The Monster in the Man

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The Monster in the Man

by x_Music_Of_The_Night_x

Summary

Will Graham is an artist. He doesn't think so, but everyone else seems to. He is famous for his graphic depictions and most people thought Will must be a tortured soul to paint something so violent, so sad, so lustful. They'd be right in a way. Will's empathy effected him in ways no one could know or so he thought. One of his art galleries attracts an odd crowd and with it, many people seemingly vieing for Will's attention. Though one has seemed to stake a claim over Will.

Chapter 1

Will is an artist. His works are known around the world and are in private as well as public collections. He hadn't meant to be famous, he hadn't even wanted anyone to see his art and the terrifying visages they depicted. Men grown in trees with flowers as his intestines, women burnt and sitting over her own grave in a depiction of Shiva and rebirth and many more.

Will is no snob, but those who collect his art are. He's been to gallery upon gallery, each person saying something different about the art they purchased. Everyone assumes that Will is a tortured soul whom has demons he can't escape... and they'd be right. Will's empathy is what gave way to his art.

Will got used to people buying and judging his art. They didn't matter. Alana mattered, as did Jack, his former Boss when he was a police officer. Because of being shot in the shoulder of his dominant arm, shattering the bone, he had been put through physical therapy. One exercise, painting. This is where it began for him.

Alana encouraged him to show it off as she thought it was very good and it was a good way for Will to reintroduce himself to the world. Now with several blue ribbons, awards, and enough money to buy even the most expensive paints... Will felt empty. The art still flowed like ink on paper, but... it wasn't the same as the pride he took in the few pieces he cranked out a year. Alana saw it, as did everyone else who helped him along the way.

"Come on. I promise, this gallery will be fun!" Alana said, pulling Will along, her arm hooked in his.

"You say that about all of them and I always have some drunk snob trying to get with me at the end of the night." Will huffed.

"This won't be like last time. These are new clients, new people, fresh faces who want to see the artist behind the pieces they're buying." She smiled, hope interlaced with pride in her voice. Will had trouble smiling... but he always did it for her.

"Just... how is this different, Alana?"

"I set up a few things, pulled a few strings, greased a few palms, and managed to get you a gallery in an underground artist's ring."

"So... like the black market, but for art?"

"Yes? I don't know actually. Only that these people have been fans of your work for a while. I've been told you've got some admirers." She nudged him with her shoulder and winked.

"I don't want admirers, Alana." Will sighed and ran a palm down his face. "I just want... I

don't know... but not some rich snob's grubby paws all over my art."

"Alright, alright, I get it. We'll get this over with. Shake some hands, make some bank, then go home and eat kettle corn and watch bad movies." She looked up at him and smiled softly. "Okay?"

Will returned the smile and they reached a large and very nice hotel. It wasn't uncommon for Will to travel for galleries, but he'd never been put up so nicely before. "I hope the popcorn is free..." he muttered and Alana laughed, elbowing his side.

They entered and Will found himself in the middle his gallery, feeling like a piece himself for people to gawk at. There was pink champagne which Will found interesting and it was what he had gorged himself on for most of the night as pieces were auctioned off.

Then as everything seemed to wind down a bit, another wave of people came flooding in. Though, flooding wasn't the right word because these people were far more elegant than the first crowd and dressed so nicely, Will almost thought he should have dressed better. A tshirt and a sport coat didn't feel like enough.

These people marveled at his art, more so than any other had. A man clapped a rough hand over Will's shoulder, effectively startling him.

"Hehe, woah there. I keep forgetting you humans are so finicky. Mason Verger. You must be Mr. Graham. I've heard a lot about you from my collegues." The man was boisterous to say the least.

"Wait, did you say--"

"How are you liking the hotel?" The man cut him off. The question died in Will's throat. "I'd love to know. Please, be honest!"

A woman came to Mason's side, she was thin, lithe, and actually quite pretty. "He hates opinions but loves to give his own. Margot Verger." She held out her hand to Will as if she expected him to kiss it. He simply shook her hand, she smiled.

"Now that is simply not true, dear sister. I happen to love creative criticism." Mason huffed. Margot only silently agree and pried her brother's attention away from Will, which he was thankful for.

More and more people flooded in. A finicky man he learned was named Peter had spoken to him. He had a stutter and seemed quite shy if Will, but he expressed interest in the fact that Will had dogs. He said he liked dogs and suggested that maybe Will should paint them some time. Will took his number down as he quite enjoyed Peter's company. Maybe he would paint his dogs, if only to give the canvas to Peter.

A man with a cleft palate stalked around, he hadn't so much as looked at will since entering. He just seemed to watch and examine the paintings and the crowd. He settled on one of Will's more cliche paintings of a demon, his arms outstretched and his skin of oranges and reds.

Alana suggested it so that Will would practice his anatomy. He honestly thought he had thrown it away.

"Quite the gathering of characters." A man said, his calm tone a lot less frightening than Mason's had been.

"I suppose so." Will replied. He looked over the man. A light blue suit, same as the day sky, with expensive cuff links and tie pin. Then he looked to the man's face. Square and sharp, piercing eyes that made Will consider him handsome, sandy hair that was graying slightly.

"I've been to galleries, but not one quite like this. Have you?" The man asked and Will was almost shocked to discover that this man had no idea Will was the artist.

"I... I haven't. Not with this kind of company anyway. I feel... out of place."

"One could compare you to another work of art with you just standing here, away from the crowd."

Will huffed a small laugh. "Crowds... aren't my thing. I prefer watching to anything else."

"Not fond of eye contact?"

"Distracts from the bigger picture. You cam't help but wonder 'is that a burst vein?' Or 'are those whites really white?'" Will replied. He disliked faces, they hid too much. He understood body language better. He heard a small rumble of a laugh come from the man. Will felt something warm bubble in his chest for a moment. He thought it was the champagne.

"You are quite the interesting one." The man smiled a toothy grin. "One only hopes you find the company just as interesting."

"I don't think you're all that interesting." Will said bluntly. He cursed the day he was born without a filter.

The man only continued to smile. "You will."

Will watched him walk away, leaving him with a business card. He watched the man smile and had blamed the champagne for the glint of red he saw in the man's eyes.

"Hannibal Lecter, huh?" Will muttered and pocketed the card. The man was a psychiatrist, there was no way Will would meet him as a patient. Luckily, he didn't have to.

Will had several more galleries planned. Some of his earliest works had been discovered by a collector and she wished Will to be present at their unveiling. Will never liked looking back on what he made. It reminded him of the dark places he had gone in order to paint something

like that. However, he listened and came at her behest. Alana joined him, only to calm him as Will never did well in new places on his own.

She kept at his side, but made sure to keep enough distance so that patrons could interact with him. Oddly, the same thing that had happened earlier in the week at his other gallery, happened here. Things cleared out before another group of even richer people came in. Some couples, others by themselves. They paid well, but it didn't stop Will's curiosity and how they were drawn to his art.

And there was that man again. The one from the previous gallery, looking and scanning his art. Will could feel enjoyment radiating from him. He walked to the man's side and examined his suit again. Much like last time, it fit the man well, but it was of a grey plaid, the main fabric color almost a cream white.

"I just can't seem to get away from you, can I?" Will said. The man turned and gave a slight smile, almost pleased to see Will again.

"It would seem not." Doctor Lecter replied. "But as they say, Like attract like."

"I wouldn't... consider you and myself alike." The artist let out an amused breath, almost a laugh.

"You're thinking of my social standing, aren't you?" The doctor asked.

"Yes. That and how you dress. You like the finer things. This many people of similar taste in this kind of gallery... it's odd to me."

Hannibal gave a curt nod. "How so?" he asked.

"This gallery isn't--"

"Will!" Alana quickly hooked her arm in his own. "I need you. Right now. Like... *right now*."

"What? What happened?" Will asked.

"Just... meet me upstairs okay?" She looked extremely worried. Will nodded and she left, rushing up the stairs in her heels.

"I... guess this is goodbye." The artist turned to follow Alana.

"Will." The doctor called. "You never did tell me your name at our first meeting."

"Neither did you, Doctor Lecter." Will replied. "But a card seemed to suffice to you."

"That was rather rude of me." Hannibal walked to Will in a calm stride, then held his hand out to Will with an almost friendly smile. Will thought it felt fake, yet he took Hannibal's hand. "I'm quite a fan of yours. I apologize for not recognizing you sooner Mister Graham."

"Will is fine." The painter said quickly. The title of Mister reminding him of his father. "And... I'm not mad you didn't recognize me. I... enjoyed the fact. You weren't pestering me

for my life story or asking me if I was tortured by my past."

"Do people actually do that?" Hannibal asked.

"You'd been surprised at how many people do."

"We'll have to remedy that then. I want to learn about you, Will. But not in the way everyone else does. I think you are... fascinating."

"Everyone else does as well, Doctor Lecter. You don't feel any different than them. You're a psychiatrist, it's in your nature to want to take me apart."

"Not me, Will. I may not know how to shut it off, but I know when to hold my tongue."

"I don't want to meet you in a professional environment."

"Then god forbid we actually socialize like adults."

Will smiled slightly. Hannibal was more interesting than Will have him credit, it wouldn't hurt to *try* and socialize. Alana would appreciate not being the only person in his life. Will pulled Hannibal's card from his jacket pocket and a pen. He wrote his number down on it and handed it to Hannibal. "*One* meeting. The moment you start asking questions about my art or try to psychoanalyze me, I walk."

"One is all I need to convince you." Hannibal's smile became somewhat sincere and Will was unsure what to make of this man's interest. "Thank you, Will."

"Yeah... You're welcome, I guess." Will replied and walked up the stairs to find Alana scrambling over Will's buyer book. "Alright Alana, what happened? Did you write down the wrong price again?"

"N-no... Someone...." She was quiet for only a moment. "Someone stole the Red Dragon."

Will's heart sank. To be stolen from as an artist was meant to be flattering, but the place he had been in when he painted that was bad. He painted the freak on his back, the wound in his shoulder, the constant pain of having to force himself to paint so that the pain would lessen. His shoulder throbbed and Will clutched it.

"Well.... shit."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will'd day started with coffee overloaded with sugar. Alana had gotten into the habit of buying him something called death wish, it helped a lot with how tired he was in the mornings from his nightmares. The caffeine woke him up enough, however the residual crash that would inevitably happen after lunch was a trade of for waking in the morning. The galleries were over, however auctions were not. But those were Alana's job. She did the math, set the lowest price and was generally Will's manager.

She had been his psychiatrist for a short while after he had been shot, they got along well enough but Will's want for further companionship ruined their professional relationship. Now they were just friends. Alana was someone he could confide in and someone he could trust to keep an eye on him in case he became over loaded. She had left early that morning to handle the Red Dragon fiasco and put together more security for the auction.

Will had been left in their hotel room which honestly could pass for a small apartment as it had a couple queen beds in one room and a living room and kitchen in another. Will was a simple man and honestly, he didn't think he needed something this nice. However, Mason Verger insisted upon it.

Will's phone buzzed in his sweatpants pocket and he picked it up, reading a text from an unknown number.

Still interested in our one meeting, Will? How about breakfast?

Will turned his phone in his hands as he thought about his meeting with Hannibal. Will wasn't used to breakfast. He rarely ate even two meals a day, which all and all wasn't healthy for him.

Are you paying? Will asked bluntly.

I'm cooking. Hannibal replied.

Will wasn't quite comfortable with the fact that he had been invited to Hannibal's house, but... he doubted things could get any weirder than the dreams he had been having since arriving at Verger tower. He agreed and Hannibal sent him the address which Will sent to Alana, just in case. The woman always wanted to know where he was as Will had had problems before in which he would go to unsavory places and as Alana put it, "*Start shit.*"

He got dressed and haled a cab. It felt like a long drive, but looking on his phone it was only a twenty minute drive. Hannibal lived in an open almost too large house on acres of land Will hadn't known would exist so close to the city. He had the cab stop at the gate and Will walked to the door. He pulled his phone from his pocket and texted Hannibal.

Am I supposed to knock? He asked.

It would be polite, however I already know you're here. Hannibal replied.

Will soon heard the shuffle of feet and the click of a lock. There Hannibal was in a red sweater and still in night pants. Will found it amusing but it made the psychiatrist feel more like a person rather than some rich snob who turned their nose up at anyone like Will.

The house was empty, living rooms were barren of furniture and the furniture that he did see was covered by stark white sheets. Boxes littered the floors all extremely large, some big enough that Will estimated that they would need to be lifted by two people.

"Please, come in." He smiled courteously. Hannibal closed the door behind him then led Will to the kitchen which was equally as pompous as the rest of the house with white marble counters, expensive appliances and cutlery, as well a wine rack. "Eggs, Pancakes, and breakfast sausage." The man handed a plate off to Will and a fork. "Coffee?"

"Uh... no. I've had enough coffee. Any more caffeine and I might explode." Will replied and started to eat, leaning against the counter. "Just juice."

Hannibal gave a curt nod and did so before starting to eat as well. "You have a dependency on caffeine, Will?"

"I guess so. It's a way for me to stay awake." Will replied.

"It's only a temporary solution. What is keeping you awake?"

"Nothing keeps me from sleeping." The artist replied. Hannibal was obviously prying and it bothered him.

"Nightmares then?"

"I'd rather you didn't pry, Hannibal." Will said in a warning tone and set down his half finished plate.

"I apologize." Hannibal said quickly. "I only want to know you better."

"Know me better by asking about my sleeping habits?" Will rolled his eyes. "My nightmares are none of your concern and if you really wished to know me you'd ask... something less personal."

Hannibal turned his cup in his hands. "I overstepped your boundaries which you've obviously built for a reason."

"I just... don't enjoy people prying into something they won't understand."

"I understand."

A moment passed in silence, it wasn't at all comfortable and Will regretted snapping. Hannibal was a stranger to him, but he was sure the man didn't deserve Will's temper.

"You like cooking?" Will asked.

"I enjoy it, yes. I rarely eat out. I'm very careful about what I put into my body."

"I guess when you do go out, it's expensive." Will huffed.

"Sometimes. But there are places we could go if you don't feel comfortable here." Hannibal replied. "I know it was... odd for me to invite you here."

Will huffed something like a laugh. "You could have been a serial killer for all I knew. I've been invited to people's homes before."

"Why did you accept my offer?"

"I rarely meet a patron twice at my exhibitions. They usually buy a piece then leave, never to be seen again." Will replied. "I'm a novelty, Doctor Lecter. *A tortured soul with a beautiful mind*." The last sentence came out bitterly. "My illness is not entertainment and the people who buy my art are pompous rich snobs who--" Will froze and pinched the bridge of his nose. Side effect of caffeine, Will's temper raged to all time highs. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... ugh, god." Embarrassment rose high on his cheeks.

"I agree with you, Will. You don't need to apologize." Hannibal placed a hand on Will's shoulder. "Many people with money tend to over exert the fact that they have it. I know for a fact that many of your patrons did not work for what they have."

"You did?"

"I did. I still do. I was born into a rich family, but nothing but this house was left to me." Hannibal set his glass down and picked up Will's plate, half-eaten and cold now. He cleaned dishes as he continued. "Psychiatry is a way for me to make the money I need and live the way I like as well as do what I love."

"What? Looking inside the heads of psychopaths?"

The side of Hannibal's lips quirked upward and he let out an amused huff. "Not all that I treat are psychopaths and though I may treat some on occasion, it's minds like yours that fascinate me."

"So am I just your momentary entertainment because I'm so *special*?"

"No, Will. I don't intend to treat you the way I do anyone professionally. I want to be your friend, know you, and if you are every comfortable with it, help you understand that gift you so much think is a curse." Hannibal placed the plates on the drying rack, the clinking of ceramic plates making Will cringe. "Pure empathy. You've controlled it here, but you could assume anyone's point of view, even my own if you wished it."

"I don't, but where are you going with this?"

"You could use it to your benefit at the very least. Find clients... worth befriending."

"Emphasis on the 'worth' I presume."

"You'll find that not everyone is out to get you, Will. Some are, but not all. Mason Verger has his eye on you, as does his sister and a number of others in their... group. I'd be cautious of the brother as he was... quite spoiled as a child."

"Thanks for the warning." Will huffed and pushed himself from the counter. His phone buzzed in his pocket, the caller ID Alana's.

"So how's the date going?"

"It's not-- what do you mean? How did you know I was going anywhere important."

"Google maps, Will. That's a huge ass mansion."

"Right..." Will hissed. "What's this about?"

"Oh, right. Jack asked around and found some of the last gallery's patrons. He asked them some questions and everything is pointing to this Francis guy. He's an odd ball, however, he's also a big shot in the film photography industry. Don't know why he'd want the Red Dragon, but Jack doubts the guy has it. Worth checking out?"

"Yeah. Sure. Just... if he really wants to keep it, make him pay for it. I need that thing off may hands and out of my head.

"Got it." A moment of silence passed. "Are you okay, Will?"

"I'm never just okay, am I?"

"Well... as okay as you get?"

"Yeah, Alana. I'm okay. I'll meet you back at the hotel." He hung up the phone and turned to Hannibal. His caffeine already making him crash, it didn't usually happen this early in the morning... maybe he didn't use enough sugar?

"Will, are you feeling alright?" Hannibal asked, a palm pressed back to Will's shoulder as he looked the artist in the eye.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine. I just... need sleep and... I want to go home."

"Missing something?"

"Yeah, my dogs. A friend has been taking care of them the past two weeks and... I haven't had time to work which is why I'm so tired."

"Painting helps you sleep?"

"It puts the nightmares on paper so they'll stay out of my head." Will replied and texted the cab service.

"Putting them on paper makes them real, Will. Are you comfortable with that?"

"They make me money... doesn't matter."

Hannibal walked him out of the manner as the taxi pulled up.

"Oh, one more thing. What's with all the boxes? Are you moving?" Will asked out of curiosity.

"I am. My profession calls me elsewhere. I've been commissioned to work with the FBI."

"Funny. I've got a friend working for them. Wish you luck, Hannibal."

"And I, you, Will."

The ride back was slow, so slow Will slept. The sound of ambulances and a bright light in his face woke him up. He hurt badly and felt himself being dragged across a hard surface then soft hands on his cheeks. He barely opened his eyes and saw a very blurry and obviously crying Alana. The moment he tried to ask what happened, he lost consciousness. His dreams were odd.

Chapter End Notes

le gasp OH NO! WHAT HAS HAPPENED!? STAY TUNED AND FIND OUT SOME OTHER TIME ON "GUESS THAT TRAUMA!!!"

Hope you like the art, I wanted to at least do one. If anyone thinks I should make more, I'd love to know. I'm not professional and I wanna make them super nice but I'm still not great at digital art.

Drop by and say hi!

myworthlessson.tumblr.com

Chapter 3

Will felt smooth hands on his cheeks, nothing felt particularly real and he felt as if he laid in empty space or rather laid on nothing at all. The hands shifted from his cheeks to his neck, tracing over the lines of his neck, then further downward to his chest. He felt almost painfully warm as these cool fingers traced lines down his body. Each touch feather light and oh so careful. He didn't know if his eyes were open or not, which attested to how dark his surroundings were. There was a strange familiarity to how this person touched him yet it was unfamiliar all the same. The unfamiliarity made him panic and the moment he tried to move away a voice spoke. Unfamiliar and familiar all the same as well.

"It's alright, Will..." They said, voice so quiet it almost felt like something speaking in the back of his head. "Let me help you."

Their hands fanned out over his body, tracing soothing lines. The amount of touching would be considered sexual, but Will only felt comfort from it. He was pulled from the person's touch all too quickly and Will felt as if his head had been slammed into a door. He opened his eyes to find himself in a hospital bed, Alana's hand in his own and Jack, asleep on the couch across the room.

He blinked in confusion. He had been in a taxi ride back to the hotel. How did this happen? He opened his mouth only for little more than a wheeze to come out. His mouth felt dry and his head pounded. He must have been out for a while. Alana quickly looked up at him as he squeezed her hand and let out a shaking sigh.

"Oh! Will! Are you awake? Can you hear me?" He was quick to act and stood up, lacing her fingers in his own and trying to get a response.

"What.... what happened?" Will asked.

"A car accident. You were riding home and a truck slammed into the side of your Taxi." She replied then kissed her friend's forehead, relieved and almost crying. "The driver was killed... the doctors didn't say much about... what would happen to you. You're concussed, you've got a broken radius and one of your shoulders had been dislocated. Luckily, nothing else happened. Only a couple bruised ribs and pulled muscles."

"How long was I... how long have I been here?"

"Only three days. They were starting to tell me you might have been out even longer... can't trust a damn thing these doctors say..." She huffed and sat back down at Will's side. "Will... while you were out... you sleepwalked. So much so that they had to start locking your door at night. Do you remember anything? You carried out a full conversation with Jack."

"No... I-I don't..." Will replied, almost frightened that something like that happened. It wasn't uncommon for him to do it, but he never went further than a few steps and never spoke to anyone.

Alana sighed. "It's alright. You're alright and that's all that matters. You've been getting a call or a text a day from someone. The person you went to see before the accident?" She asked.

"Let me see the number?"

She handed the phone off to him and he didn't recognize the number as he hadn't saved it in his phone, however, looking back at earlier texts, he found that it had been Hannibal.

I'd been thinking about our conversation. I know you only agreed to the one meeting, but I would hope I made at least a lasting impression on you. I'd hoped to show you one of my favorite coffee shops and maybe introduce you to something better than what ever had been keeping you awake. Espresso works better.

It had been another day before another text came through.

I don't with to be an annoyance, but I saw a car crash announced on television. It was near the Verger hotel, which I have no doubt he set you up in one of the nicer rooms. It's how he treats most of the guests he somewhat favors. I only hope you weren't involved.

Another just a few hours later.

It seems you were. I hope that you are alright.

That was the last text he received and he looked to Alana. "You told the news to release my name?"

"I know. You have every right to be mad at me, but... free publicity?"

"Oh my god, Alana. I could have died and that's what you care about?"

"No! No! I care about you and I know that it wasn't right but I wasn't thinking at the time..."

Will only rolled his eyes and sighed. "Please, if I ever die in some accident... DON'T use it for publicity."

"I won't. Scouts honor." She replied. "I'm just... I'm just glad you're alright. Jack traveled all the way from Baltimore to visit. Bella isn't too happy with him about it, but he's been keeping watch so you didn't walk off in the middle of the night." Alana looked over her shoulder to the sleeping man on the couch. "He's kind of adapted to the sleeping schedule."

Will only smiled. Jack was always nice to him and was once his superior. Now he was just his friend and Will preferred it that way. He'd like to think Jack did too.

"It's been a long few days without you. I know you got some well needed sleep but... you did have nightmares..."

"I know." Will replied. "I just don't remember what they were about. It all felt so short. One minute I was in the cab, the next I was here."

"The confusion is understandable." Alana sighed. "Hey... you hungry? I think they've actually got a sandwich shop on the first floor. Like real food, sandwich shop."

"I'm starving." Will replied and his friend smiled and stood up.

"Good, because so am I. You think Jack will appreciate me waking him up with a sandwich?"

"I doubt he'll be angry about free food." Will replied and yawned.

Alana huffed a small chuckle. "Leave it to you to be in a coma for part of a week and still be tired."

"Give me a break. I doubt they'll let me have my coffee."

"No. They say that the excess caffeine I've been giving you might give you a stomach ulcer. So they advise me to suggest that you drink it only once or twice a week and that we find a substitute."

"Want me to take up smoking again?"

"Over my dead body, Will." Alana glared for only a moment before turning and walking to the door. "Sandwich time. I'm dying. You rest. You are on the 12th floor of this hospital so I'll be a bit." With that she left and Will was left alone, or rather he was the only conscious person in the room. Though it didn't last long as he was lulled into sleep once again by the sort of rhythmic sound of footsteps out in the hall.

"*Hush, Will. Wade into the quiet of the stream*." The voice said and it too lulled Will to sleep.

Chapter 4

Will knew he was walking down a hall. He could feel the cold tile on his feet and see to the end where a large window was. He paused as he'd forgotten where he was now. He wasn't quite worried about to much as he was curious. Something gently pushed his arm forward, ushering him to keep walking. He looked back and found nothing except for more hall, however he couldn't see as far back as he could see forward. It only faded into darkness. He figured the only way was forward, so he kept walking. The tile almost unbearably cold against his bare feet.

He reached the window and found there was no way forward. Just that he could see outside. It was snowing, not heavily, but Will figured it had been snowing long enough for a thick sheet of powder to cover the ground and it was so dark outside except for a few florescent street lamps which made the snow seem unnaturally white. It was odd as Will remembered it was March and the spring had started unbearably warm. He pressed his palm to the glass which was colder than the floor he stood on. Something gently pushed at him again, but there was no way forward... not one that Will wished to take. He then felt warm hands wrap themselves around him and pull him away from the window. He woke up.

It was late night, at least his dream was right about that. It had been snowing, but not for near as long in Will's dream. He was freezing and he realized he couldn't feel his fingertips nor his toes. He was outside on his room's balcony, his hands clutching the freezing cold railing as if he had been hanging on for dear life. He let go and hissed as he almost felt as if his fingers had frozen to the bar. He was pulled back further by someone. That someone being Jack. He realized it as Jack was a heavier man and quite a lot stronger than Will and the fact that the thick arms around him were holding on to tightly, Will was sure he had been fighting.

"You... can let me go now." Will muttered.

"You fucking sure?" Jack asked, exasperated.

"Yeah. I'm awake. I'm good."

With that, the arms slid away and Will closed the sliding door out to the balcony. He looked down at his hands, which were red as blood rushed back to them. They hurt and he looked at his palms which were almost raw from clutching the freezing rail.

"You're strong when you want to be." Jack huffed, making Will turn. "You wouldn't even talk to me this time. You just kept trying to go over the rail."

"That's... That's terrifying." Will's voice actually shook at the thought. "I... I need to get out of here soon, or moved to a first floor room..."

"Yeah, you do." Jack replied. "Lucky for you, as long as I don't tell anyone about this, you'll be out by tomorrow."

"I really don't want to be put on suicide watch again."

"Neither do I. A room with no windows isn't good for anyone." Jack took Will's hands and looked over them. "Well, you're not blue, just a little red."

"Are you okay? What happened?"

"You just kind of got up and went out on the balcony. I knew you were sleep walking and I remember you told me to leave you alone, but then you started trying to climb over the railing. Sorry if I ended up bruising more ribs."

"What?"

"You wouldn't let go. I put my entire weight into pulling you off that thing. You *still* wouldn't let go."

"Oh." Will muttered.

" 'Oh' is right. You say you're terrified, imagine when you pulled Hulk like strength out of your ass."

Will chuckled quietly, still worried about what could have happened if Jack hadn't been watching him.

"Go back to sleep. We'll deal with everything in the morning okay. I'm watching. You don't have to worry about anything." Jack squeezed Will's shoulders and let him go. He sat back down on the couch which didn't look all that comfortable, yet the man had been there for the entirety of Will's stay. The man worked for the FBI and had taken time off for Will. He'd almost feel bad if he knew Jack didn't want to be here.

Will laid himself back down, still freezing, but slowly warming up. His fingers hurt as they warmed, it kept him up for likely longer than Will thought, but he fell asleep again.

The sun really hurt his eyes as he woke up. He sat himself up to find Jack gone and Alana talking to a nurse outside the building. Mid-conversation she turned and smiled to Will. She excused herself and walked back into the room. "You're being released today. Excited?"

"I kind of just want to go home." Will sighed.

"Unfortunately, the doctor told us not to take any flights any time soon. Something about blood clots and I really don't want you to die on an airplane."

"So, what are we going to do?"

"Jack's going to drive you back to Baltimore."

"And you?"

"I... have a date?"

"Date?"

"Yeah. Margot, you know the sister to that obnoxious guy who kinda circled you like a vulture?"

"Oh yeah, her. Congratulations, I guess?"

"I'll be back before you know it. I still need to fix this Red Dragon thing and finish up our auctions."

"I get it. Seriously, you should have been an accountant, not a psychiatrist."

She only smiled and rolled her eyes. He phone rang and she answered to Jack. The conversation didn't last long. "And now your ride is here."

"Yes. So excited for a three and half hour drive." Will huffed.

"Hey. Don't be passive aggressive. That's my thing." She huffed back and put down a bag full of clean clothes. "I got Jack to bring these before he left Baltimore. The doctor says to keep the cast for eight weeks then get your doctor to take it off. Don't get it wet and... invest in a back scratcher or something. I broke by arm when I was twelve and it was terrible."

Will chuckled incredulously and only nodded. "Sure. Now get out so I can finally wear pants again."

She gave him one last smile, pulled back the curtain his door and left the room.

Will was happy to be wearing jeans and a t shirt again. The doctor had him in his underwear and a gown for the whole stay so he could continue checking on Will's ribs, which were healing nicely. It'd take a couple more weeks for the pain to really go away.

He exited his room a free man and though it was offered, Will really didn't want to be wheeled out of the hospital. Instead, the nurse just escorted him. She asked about his art and Will wasn't particularly pleased about it. He didn't like the fact that it was the first thing that anyone asked about, but... he guessed it was the only thing that was going to start a conversation with him.

He met Jack outside and the man looked as tired as Will was.

"Ready?"

"Yeah. I can't believe you drove here."

"Cheaper, plus Bella needed our flight money for work." He replied.

"How is she?"

"Mad at me, but what can I do? I wanted to be here for my friend after all."

"Don't let anyone at the FBI hear you say something like that. They might lose all respect for you."

Jack rolled his eyes. "Shut up and get in the car."

"Sir, yes sir." Will sighed and got in the passenger side. He'd offer to drive and let Jack sleep, but the pain medication he was on told him not to operate heavy machinery. He was just as tired as Jack was and it wasn't until now that he realized how sore he was. He couldn't tell if it was from the crash or from Jack pulling him from the balcony the night before, but his muscles ached everywhere. He leaned back in his seat and fell asleep watching the hospital disappear into the distance.

Chapter 5

Will woke to his bumpy driveway and the sound of barking dogs. He was home and he finally felt the disease that he had been feeling since he left dissipate. Jack bumped his arm to wake him and parked the car next to Will's own. They both exited the car and Will was shocked at the amount of snow that covered his property. It wasn't uncommon for it to snow so much, but he knew for a fact now that it was March and it had been strangely hot the week prior. Will grabbed his things from Jack's trunk and unlocked his door, letting the dogs slip past him to run around and take their bathroom breaks. Winston, his newest dog, sat patiently at the door any looked up at Will with deep brown eyes.

"Hello." Will greeted him and as he did so, the dog's tongue flopped out of his mouth and his tail beat hard on the wood floor happily. Winston licked at the side of Will's jeans and at his hands until Will would pet him.

Jack walked in on the phone. He was arguing with someone which Will devised to be the Baltimore police department begging for him to come back and wrangle the rest of his team. He hung up as the man on the other line was in mid-sentence. He sighed heavily and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I was supposed to watch you for the rest of the day, but... there's been another murder."

"Another?" Will asked. "Usually you just say that there's been a murder. This a repeating thing?" Will asked. He'd gotten out of the game a long time ago, but Jack still confided in him and gave him credit where credit was due. Will had assisted him in identifying several killers in the past since the accident, but recently, murders had gone stagnant. Nothing but muggings gone wrong and gang disputes.

"We've got a new psycho in town, it would seem. Or an old one. We're not sure." Jack replied. "This one's creative and... well, it's been hard to sleep at night with what I've seen."

"If you need me or Alana..."

"I know. I know. Bella will be home soon, which will help with my sleep schedule. Until then... I'll have to deal."

"Go do your job, save some lives, and put some families at ease. You know where I am and... Winston can do your job. He never leaves my side anyway."

Jack chuckled and shoved his phone in his pocket. "Call me if anything happens, call me if anything doesn't. Alana will have my ass if she ever finds out I left you alone."

"I'm not a kid, Jack. You don't have to worry."

The older man nodded and left, driving away quickly and was out of sight as he passed the treeline.

Will was left alone with his thoughts.

He hated it.

Will had found it difficult to get himself to paint. It wasn't just the cast but the amount of nondescript dreams he had been having. He painted the hallway as he remembered it and he slowly recalled the voice that had whispered to him and the hands that touched him. He couldn't paint it without knowing what the form of it was and it scared him. The only way to end the nightmare was to put it on paper and he couldn't. He settled for painting his cast. He didn't own very many vibrant colors, but it was comforting just to paint nondescript shapes onto the cast.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and he picked it up to a familiar voice.

"Will." Hannibal said, almost in a relieved tone, but Will couldn't quite tell. "I heard you were released from the hospital today."

"How did you..."

"Alana. Your friend came by to see me not too long ago. She seemed quite interested in my intentions with you."

"Oh my god..."

"She's quite fond of you. I... only wished to ask if you were alright. She told me what happened. You were lucky it wasn't worse. She had told be that the driver had been... ejected."

"Some people just don't believe in seat-belts. I'm alright, thank you for asking Doctor."

"That is good to know." There was a slow silence. "I also wanted to ask if you'd like to get coffee."

"I'm not with Alana anymore. She sent me home."

"She told me about that. She asked about my moving and I told her I was moving to Alexandra, Virginia."

Will almost couldn't believe what he was hearing. Hannibal was working with Jack's branch of the FBI. Hannibal was only going to be an hour an a half away at most. "You did say you were going to work with the FBI. Quantico?"

"Yes. I needed to be much closer if I were to take the job."

"What is the job?"

"A type of psychological profiler. I am a psychiatrist but... If you don't mind my saying, you might be better suited to the job."

"No. No. I won't go within fifty feet of that." Will huffed. "I was a cop... I can't do anything like that again."

"I see." Hannibal replied. "If you were to take the job I suppose it'd have negative effects on you."

"Yeah. I did it once. Not again. Last time I went there, I brought something back with me." Will paused. "This isn't a psychological call... you asked if I wanted to get coffee..."

"I did."

"Sure. Coffee sounds good." Will sighed. "Where?" He could hardly believe he was going to see Hannibal again. Will made no habit of seeing his patrons but he had already told Hannibal too many personal facts about himself. Free Coffee was Will's weakness and unfortunately, he became more and more aware at how badly he needed a psychiatrist. He confided in Alana more than anyone, but she was his friend. She couldn't treat him the way someone else could. Maybe he'd ask if Hannibal was still going to take patients while working with the FBI.

Will met Hannibal the next morning in an inner city cafe which was a little too nice for Will's standards. He would have been happy with a Starbucks, but this was one of those places that smelled less like cheep coffee and more like spices and frilly baked goods with names that were hard to pronounce. He didn't even order for himself as some or rather half the menu were French and Turkish coffees he'd never heard of.

Hannibal handed him a hot cup and sat himself down across from Will. "It's nothing too adventurous, but I suggest you do try it before adding anything to it." Hannibal gave a small smile and drank his own. Will looked down at the black coffee and shrugged. It couldn't be any worse than the terrible things he'd had in college. He sipped it and though he was never the biggest fan of bitter black coffee, he could live with this kind.

"So... I have no idea how these things work. You like what I do and you said you wanted to be my friend." Will muttered. "I suppose I respect that but I don't know... how to make friends."

"We talk. It's simple to find what people like to talk about." Hannibal replied. "Alana told me you like fishing."

"Fly-fishing. She shares too much with strangers..." Will sighed.

"On the contrary, Alana and I earned our degrees in psychiatry together. She's a close colleague."

"She's never mentioned you... but then again, she never mentions anyone."

"She called me when she was your psychiatrist only a few times. It was never anything about your treatment, just how she felt about you."

"We became a bit too close to be counted as doctor and patient anymore."

"I know. She said that you withdrew from therapy as you felt it wasn't proper for you to pay her to be your friend?"

"She agreed. She'd mentioned it in other sessions but... I was too attached. As was she."

"Stopping your therapy has clearly benefited her, but what about you? Are you happy as things are?" Hannibal asked. "She told me she's worried about you."

An image of what occurred just a couple nights ago flashed through Will's head. "This is beginning to sound more and more like an intervention."

"Does someone need to intervene in your life, Will?"

"No. But you've clearly got an opinion you're keeping to yourself right now."

"You are right. I think you need change. You don't need stability as much as you need something to occupy your time." Hannibal replied. "You've been doing so by painting and when I saw you at that gallery, you didn't look happy with what you painted."

"They're just paintings. It's something I put on paper and they are usually things I want out of my life."

"It's art, Will. Regardless on how you see it, people enjoy your work but will never know the story or person behind it. If you wrote a book, they'd only buy it because your face was on it."

"And what would you do, Doctor Lecter?"

"I would hope I wouldn't need to buy it as I had you there to talk to me."

Will almost scoffed before his phone as well as Hannibal's phone buzzed. He picked it up seeing it was Jack.

"What's wrong? You never call me during work hours."

"You need to get down to Quantico. *Now*." Jack sounded rushed and almost angry. "Something's happened."

"What's happened?"

"Just get down here... it's better for you to see for yourself." Jack said before hanging up. Will looked down at his phone worriedly and stood, picking up his coffee.

"I'm sorry to cut this short, Doctor. I need to leave. It's kind of urgent."

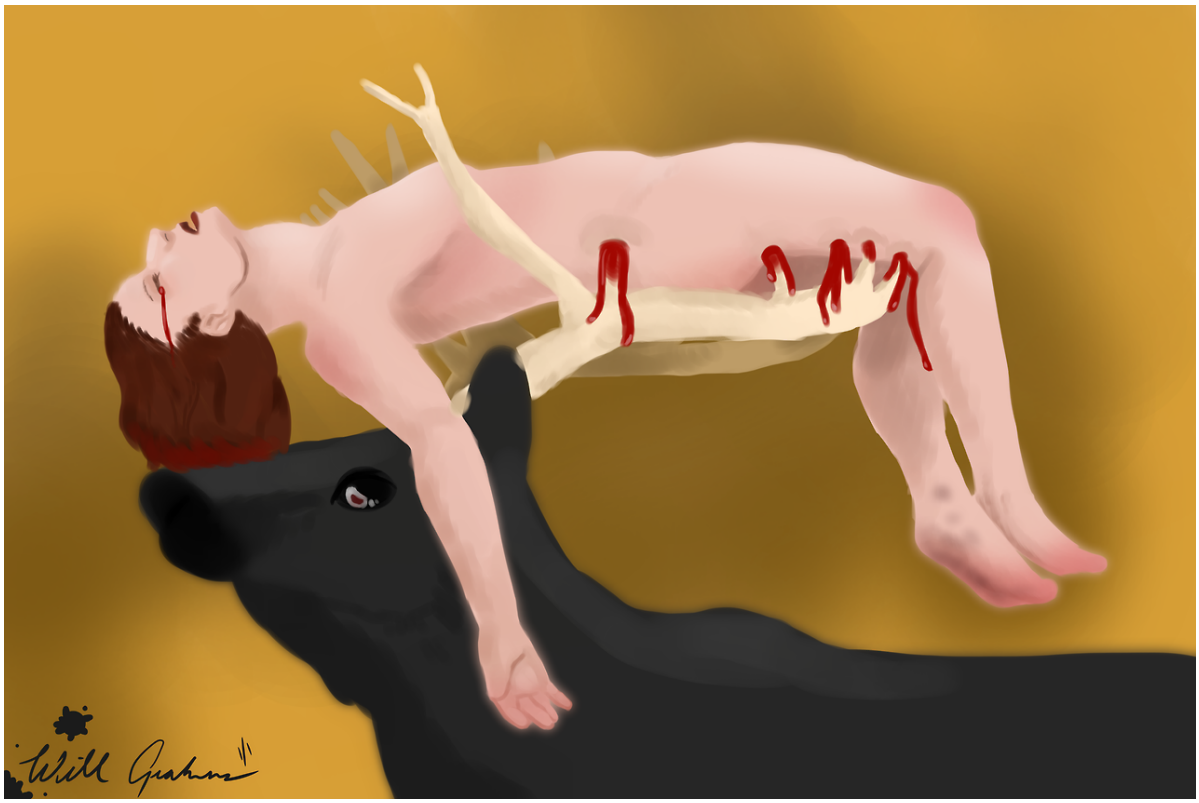
"I understand." Hannibal replied and watched Will rush out the door and to his car.

Maybe now Will could see the extent of what he was creating.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes



Will remembered the first time he'd come to Quantico. His mom had died and he'd been asked to come and identify the body. She had no immediate family except for Will and his father and his father was too much of a drunk mess to even realize his wife was dead. He walked through the doors and met Jack, a man twice his age at the time and still an officer. He could walk through the doors and he was glad most didn't know him now and a lot of the officers that had had either transferred or retired. Jack met him outside and escorted him in, looking grim as ever.

"Jack, what happened?" Will asked. "I haven't heard you talk like that since-- What happened?"

"I can't explain what happened. Someone's dead, at least half the department is blaming you but... I know you don't have the capability to do something like this. But..." Jack paused and frowned deeply.

"But?"

"When you were in the hospital, I think Alana told you about the conversation we had when you sleepwalked?"

"She did, but she just said I talked to you. That's in."

They reached Jack's office. The man went to his desk and held out a manila folder to Will. His face was still grim and Will was almost scared to open the folder. Almost being the key word. He was more curious than anything at how this connected to him. He took it from jack and flipped it open. Pictured upon pictures of a crime scene that looked all too familiar. A woman mounted on a stags head, how ever not as lovingly places as the painting it resembled.

"That painting is the exact one we talked about that night." Jack sighed. "And to everyone... including me... it feels to damn convenient. But you're my friend and... I think I trust you enough to know you didn't do any of this."

"This... isn't like the painting. The person who placed her like that thought she was a pig..." Will muttered, some part of him angered by this cruel imitation of his work. "Was she missing organs?"

Will knew Jack sometimes forgot Will was very good at reading crime scenes and the people who make them. "Yeah. Lungs and her liver."

"What did we talk about? The subject of the painting..."

"You told me about how hard it was to paint. How you really never liked it because you'd made the woman resemble your mother. There's an entire hours worth of me trying to coax you back to sleep in there somewhere."

"You're the only person I've told that then..." Will couldn't stop looking at the pictures. "These pictures were not the imitation he thought they were. Everything about it felt different. It wasn't a careful placement of limbs that Will had made. This woman had been gored, but there was no struggle... at least not while she was being mounted.

"Will... is this a one time thing?" Jack asked. "Or should we expect... more like this?"

"I don't know, Jack." Will put down the folder, tearing his eyes away from it. "I don't have enough information to really figure out what kind of person this is."

Jack groaned and pinched the bridge of his nose. "This goddamn ridiculous. If this happens again... I don't know what will happen. But I need you on this. You know people... you know this."

"You've been trying to get me on cases since I retired..." Will gave a slight shaky smile, his face unused to doing so. "I can't... I can't turn it off, Jack. You know that. If I go there... I'll bring something back again and Alana won't be able to help this time."

"I know you need someone to pull you out of those dark places. We've got several psychiatrists on the premises. We have one that may be working on this case. If you take this, I can set you up. I'll pay for all of it."

Will sighed. "I understand you need me on this... but if I go too far, I don't think there'll be any pulling me back... at least not easily."

"I'm willing to take that chance."

"Then you have me." Will could remember the last time he caved to this. He had a breakdown. Alana nearly had him committed and threatened him with the fact that she could, several times.

"Thank you." Jack gave a curt nod. "I'll get in contact with Doctor Lecter and see if I can set up an appointment for you with him."

"Oh you've got to be kidding me..." Will uttered under his breath. Jack heard him say something, but was too busy dialing the phone to really pay attention.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry it's so short. I'm really trying but I've been so busy and I've been having trouble writing. Hope you forgive me.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> I'm so sorry it's short again. I will try to post a long chapter soon with some art to make up for it!

The first appointment Will received with Hannibal went marginally better than expected. Hannibal had rubber stamped him to put it shortly. Hannibal didn't ask a single question and had said that he was more or less sane. It didn't make Will feel much better, he still dreaded even being in the same room as a body and what that might entail.

"I could be far less stable than you're giving me credit for." Will said as he wandered part of Hannibal's office. He didn't feel comfortable sitting down just yet. He never did well in new places. Alana was all to astute in pointing that out to him.

"I was given your files, Will. I think you're more likely to hurt yourself than anyone else." Hannibal replied.

Will huffed an unammused chuckle. "I think that's what Jack is afraid of. He needs me on a tight leash so this... won't pull me down the rabbit hole again."

"Jack needs someone to pull you out of the dark places he sends you to and he doesn't think Alana can really do that for you anymore."

"I'm not fragile, I'm..."

"You're a gift, Will."

Will frowned. "Are you resorting to flirting to get close to me? Because it is not working."

"No. If I were flirting, it'd be much more subtle." The doctor replied. "I want you to see your gift as Jack and I see it."

"I'm useful, Doctor Lecter. I'm fragile as Jack likes to point out so often."

"Jack sees you as... the fine china that he only pulls out for special guests."

"How do you see me, then?"

"The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by."

Will would scoff, but it was better than being the fragile teacup Jack is ready to clumsily break.

"I know this is meant to be an hour session, but Jack wants me at the office pretty soon." Will muttered.

"I'll be there later on in the day when the autopsy is performed." Hannibal replied and when Will walked to the door he courteously opened it for him. As Will left, Hannibal couldn't help but take in his scent, though not as obviously as he could have. Past the terrible chemical smell of his aftershave was something Hannibal wanted to Savor. It was sweet yet soft, so unlike the facade that Will constantly put on. Will reeked of dogs but at least they were clean. He smelled of river air and pine as well as metal and paint from crafting frames. Hannibal had been so caught up in Will's scent that he hadn't quite realized that the man had felt a few minutes ago. No one had such an effect on Hannibal and he came to the conclusion he wanted to peruse Will, one way or another.

The crime scene wasn't as gruesome as Will had prepared himself to be. It was surreal as it truly was his painting come to life, but in in a different connotation. It felt so different, so cruel, but it was made with someone in mind. Will dreaded to think of who this effigy was to. It was... not quite a mockery, but not quite an homage either.

"She was a pig, waiting to be slaughtered." Will muttered without thinking of who was around him.

"He uh... took out her lungs whole she was still alive. However, some field toxicity reports sat she was high. High enough that they predict she didn't feel a thing until the end." A man names Zeller said.

"It wasn't opiates or chemicals was it?" Will asked.

"No. A mixture of hallucinogenic herbs and some heavy natural depressants."

The words came out of Will's mouth before he even knew he said them. Fear makes the meat taste bad..."

Zeller looked so shoched, Will might as well have done the crime in front of the man.

"Zeller! Away! You were suppose to take the toxicology reports back to the station!" Jack said, annoyed.

The man quickly rushed away to someone else and they both left quickly for FBI headquarters.

"What do you see, Will?" Jack asked in a softer tone.

"Same thing I saw yesterday... just in 3D. She was a pig to him, but he got her high enough to remove organs without damaging or ruining them. He's a surgeon. He had to work quickly... she likely drowned in her own blood before he was even finished."

"What about it's resemblance to your painting?"

"People are already going to insinuate that I might have done it... but I made that painting with more than just disdain. My painting was not lesser than myself." Will paused for a moment then took off his glasses with a shaking cold hand. "Can... Can we go now?" He asked.

"Yeah. I need you by for the autopsy. We need everything you can get. I need you to brief the team and some of the officers on your paintings... if he's going to do this again, he might do it chronologically."

"Yeah... sure." Will gave a curt nod and left. He hadn't painted in says and he was exhausted. Now was a good of a time as any.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Lots of canon dialogue for you.

Will's next case along side his admirer was another related to dear. He worried it was another homage to his painting from the same person but this was completely different than Casey Boyle. This woman wasn't a pig. He had visited a family of one of the missing girls. None of which had been found and as he climbed up the stairs and followed the cat to her room he could practically feel the death behind the door. There he found her, pale and tucked in lovingly in her nightgown. She'd been gored as well. Will suspected Jack would think this was the painter's admirer. The father of the poor girl nearly rushed to her side but Will nearly clothes lined him stopping him from rushing through the door.

He waited to examine her until the FBI team showed up, there he met Beverly Katz. She was a nice woman with a big personality despite being an investigator. She had interrupted him as he deconstructed the crime scene and his mind was brought to a screeching halt. He trembled and felt guilty as if he had been caught killing her. Jack wasn't happy as he had the door closed for Will to examine her alone however, Beverly had made a crucial discovery.

"Antler velvet in the wounds." She said. "She was gored. Was looking for velvet in the other wounds but I was interrupted."

Zeller entered behind her. "Deer and elk pin their prey, put all their weight on the antlers and try to suffocate them. That’s how they would kill a fox or a coyote."

"Elise was strangled. Her ribs were broken." Jack interjected.

"Antler velvet is rich in nutrients. It actually promotes healing. He may have put it there on purpose." Will muttered.

"He wanted to heal her?" Jack asked.

"He'd already killed her... but he wanted to undo as much as he could." Will walked around the bed.

"He put her back where he found her. Was this his golden ticket?"

"No..." Will almost felt the killer's sadness. If he head hadn't felt like it was splitting he would have truly felt all of it. "This was an apology." After a moment of silence he looked up from the body. "Does anyone have an aspirin?"

Will found a dog on his way home down the dark desolate road to Wolf Trap. He was pretty and very skittish of Will. He had stopped and tried to pet him and the moment the dog had run from him. He had waited for a while but as the dog wouldn't come near him, he went home and got a package of sausage for him. He sat out there for half an hour before the dog came back and he came close enough for Will to feed him. His personality started to show and Will smiled down at him as the dog had let him pet him. He managed to coax him into the car and bathed him when he got home. His browning fur showed a nice blond speckled coat that Will had never seen on a dog before.

The whole time, his head throbbed and he felt like something was watching him. He put Winston up in a cage for the night so he could get used to the dogs and the dogs could get used to him. He had noticed his sluggish feeling and took another aspirin as he knew he likely had a low grade fever from his headache. He laid down to sleep and still as he watched the moon move through his window and as his eyes grew heavy, he still felt as if he was being watched.

He had nightmares. Not ones he was sure he would remember when he woke up. He was staring at empty black space and Elise Nichols slowly appeared out of it. Her dead eyes stared into him and Will felt guilty. Horns penetrated through her back and sprouted from her front and dead blood lurched slowly from the wounds. Them she disappeared back into the black as arms wrapped tightly around him and a strong chest pressed to his back. He leaned his head back against the shoulder behind him and stared into the void before him. He didn't know who it was and the thought really hadn't occurred to him that he should be worried. He only felt safe in that moment until a stag appeared before him and gored into him. In that moment he woke up he was soaked in sweat. He rushed out of his bed and pealed his shirt from him. He got into the shower and didn't even wait for the water to get hot as he took a cold show which quickly warmed. He sat in the tub, his head in his hands and his palms pressed to his eyes until he saw stars. He tried to go back to sleep afterward, but his fear of something he couldn't even remember kept him awake until the sun peaked over his property. He closed his eyes for what felt like a moment then his alarm went off. He didn't feel like he got any sleep and wished for the arms that made him feel so safe.

His phone rang with Jack on the other line. "We've found something on Casey Nichols body." He said.

"Wh... what? What did you find?" Will asked, still waking up.

"Metal caught in her nightgown. We've got a big lead." Jack replied. "I want you up here soon. Tell me why he put her back when all the others are missing."

"I'll be there in an hour." Will replied and Jack hung up. The empath sighed and curled in on himself. He wrapped his arms around his torso the way he remembered and he felt uneasy when it didn't feel the same.

He sat himself up and got prepared to look over Elise Nichols body once again.

"Do you respect my judgment?" Jack asked Will and the empath knew where this was going in that exact moment.

"Yes." The man replied.

"We have a better chance of catching this guy if you're in the saddle."

"I'm in the saddle. Just confused which direction I'm pointing." Will frowned. Wasn't it enough that Jack had sent him to Hannibal. "I don't know this kind of psychopath. Never read about him. I don't even know if he's a psychopath. He's not insensitive. He's not shallow."

"You said what he had done was an apology?" Jack asked.

"He couldn't honor her... he feels bad." Will felt bad, he felt this man's guilt ringing through him as an almost constant.

"Feeling guilt defeats the purpose of being a psychopath, doesn't it?"

"Yes... it does."

"Then what kind of crazy is he is he isn't a psychopath?"

"He couldn't show her he loved her so he put her corpse back where he killed it. Whatever crazy that is." It wasn't the way they'd seen crimes of passion. This was a different kind of love.

"You think he loves these girls?"

"He loves *one* of them." Will replied. "And by some association, he holds some form of love for the other girls."

"There was no semen or saliva. Elise Nichols died a virgin, she stayed that way." Jack almost seemed irritated.

"That's not how he's loving them. He wouldn't disrespect them that way!" Will felt himself raise his voice as if he was defending himself. "He doesn't want these girls to suffer. He kills them quickly and, to his thinking, with mercy." He said, lowering his tone.

Jack scoffed and Will could feel him roll his eyes. "The sensitive psychopath. He risked getting caught to tuck Elise Nichols back into bed."

"He has to take the next girl soon. He knows he's going to get caught. One way or the other." The next girl would be the last. His golden ticket.

Jack brought him into the autopsy room and Will couldn't force himself to look at Elise's body, he felt sick and his head was splitting again.

"Nothing under her fingernails but we did get a hand spread from her neck." He heard Beverly say after a section of conversation had passed. "The metal shavings are all we've got."

"We should be looking at plumbers, steamfitters, tool-workers." Will said absentmindedly then looked to Elise's corpse in the black body bag. His dream flashed back to him. There was no body in that bag and she was standing in front of him, accusingly and impaled. He blinked a few times and brought himself back to reality.

Zeller spoke, looking up from the puncture wounds. "Other injuries were probably but not conclusively postmortem." He turned to Katz. "She wasn't gored" She almost looked disappointed.

"She has lots of piercings that look like they were caused by deer antlers. I didn't say the deer was responsible for putting them there." Beverly replied.

"She was mounted on them. Like hooks. She may have been bled." Will interjected.

Zeller hummed. "Her liver was removed. He took it out then put it back where he found it."

Price, an older man who Will could see got along with Zeller quite well looked puzzled. "Why cut it out if he was just going to sew it back in again?" He asked.

Will felt his stomach churn at the thought, as the words perched under his chin. "There was something wrong with the meat..."

Zeller looked up at Will, a look of concern and shock taking across his features. "She has liver cancer."

Will folded his arms over his chest, almost hugging himself. He looked up from her corpse and to Zeller. "He's eating them."

Chapter 9

Hannibal met Will the day after as Jack was indisposed in his work of finding where the metal shaving from Elise Nichols led. Will felt he worked too slow and Hannibal subtly agreed with him in a way. Jack had sent him a number addresses and the number of them was small considering the amount of pipe threaders and occupations that include metal working.

"I don’t think the Shrike killed that girl in the field." Will said as he drove, his knuckles almost white as he gripped the steering wheel. Hannibal gave him a questioning look.

"The devil is in the details. What didn’t your Copy Cat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?" He asked.

"Everything." Will replied. "It's so different and the same all at once. There was no love... not the kind of love in Elise Nichols anyway.... It was admiration in that field..."

"The mathematics of human behavior. All those ugly variables. Some bad math with this shrike fellow. Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?"

Will huffed out an amused sound. "Quite a few, I think."

"Ever have any problems, Will?" Hannibal asked.

"No." Will replied simply.

Hannibal couldn't help the grin that graced his features. Luckily, Will was too focused on driving to see the amusement on the other man's face.

"Of course you don’t. You and I are just alike. Problem free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about. " Hannibal said and Will remained quiet.

They reached one of the named addresses, one Will picked at random. Hannibal could barely contain himself as Will's own unknowing intuition that had lead him to the correct place. He only hoped Will couldn't feel the excitement reverberating off him.

"What are you smiling about?" Will asked

"Peeking behind the curtain. Curious how the FBI goes about its business when it isn’t kicking in doors." Hannibal replied.

"We’re lucky we’re not doing house to house interviews." Will huffed. "We found a little piece of metal in the clothes Elise Nichols had on. A shred from a pipe threader."

"Jack Crawford wants me to make sure you’re of sound mind and body... to look for metal pipe threaders?"

Will can’t help but smile himself. "That’s between you and Jack." Will replied.

"Must be hundreds of construction sites all over Minnesota."

"Certain kinda metal. Certain kind of pipe. Certain kind of pipe coating. So we're looking at construction sites that use that kind of pipe." Will hummed and pulled a folded sheet of paper from his pocket.

"And what are we looking for?" Hannibal asked.

"At this stage, anything really. But mostly anything peculiar."

Will exited the car and was met with a flustered and mildly suspicious secretary. He office was something of a large trailer used as an office. She granted them access to their files, however, Will's head hurt from looking at the insane amount of files, applications and more. Or it could just be the low grade fever he's had for days. He only hoped it didn't show.

It had been morning when they had arrived and now it was well past noon when Will found a single file that was only two sheets of paper. A job application and a job resignation, nothing more. He left only a phone number, no address while all the others had along with a few documents showing their work, promotions, and position. But not this man.

"Garrett Jacob Hobbs..." Will said, reading out his name. The secretary had been saying something to him, but he hadn't been listening. She informed him that he was a contracted worker. Will asked about a daughter and the woman was no help at all. He put the file back, but marked it for later when he needed it. He closed to box and deemed that if he wasn't correct... that this investigation would only end with the death of another girl. The one their killer had been aiming for all along.

She helped them load up the files and Will's head screamed at him not to do anything, not even the heavy lifting of shoving file boxes into the back of his rental car. Hannibal had been doing the hard part, lifting the boxes and lowering them down to Will. As he did so, the edge clipped the rail of the stairs, sending the thing toppling down, almost hitting Will. Hannibal moved to come help gather them up.

"I got it!" Will said quickly and he and the secretary began picking them up. Hannibal headed back inside to make a warning that Will would never hear of... not in the way he wanted.

Will had gotten an idea in his head that he hadn't been able to shake. It had been something that Garrett Jacob Hobbs didn't leave. An address is personal... maybe too personal. He could shake the feeling that this man might know something, might even be their killer. He got Hobbs' address without consulting Jack on it. He took three aspirin before he even went to knock on the door. He exited the car and he barely took a few steps into the yard before Garrett Jacob Hobbs shoved his wife out the door, her neck slit. Hannibal knew she was dying before he even got out of the car. He could smell her and it took no strength to pull his instincts away from her.

Will had rushed into the house, gun drawn and Hannibal followed at an almost leisurely pace. It was only when the gunshots rang out and the smell of fresh sweet blood made him rush to the kitchen. Will was shaking, he had dropped his gun in order to try and plug the wound in

the young Hobbs girl's neck. The entirety of his body shaking at the fact that Hobbs was taunting him caused an even greater panic in the empath. Hannibal knelt down, moved Will's hand away and calmly clamped his hand over the wound. This girl was going to die, not here, not right now, but the shock would eventually kill her and the panic in Will's eyes as he had been so connected to Hobbs. She may as well have been his daughter, bleeding out on the floor in that moment.

Hannibal could save her, not only for Will, but for his own interest. No one man could find so many girls without bait and this girl had been his bait, had aided in the killings one way or another. An accessory to murder. Her death wouldn't help anything, her life would help Will, and would help Hannibal connect to Will. She had the capability to be something more than what her father would have made her, more than what being human made her. He had these thoughts as Abigail and himself were rushed away in an ambulance.

He had caught a last glimpse at Will and in that moment, he saved that image in his mind. Will leaned back, sitting on the hood of the rental car, an EMT speaking on deaf ears and Will stared at the house in front of him, blood over his hands, his face, in his hair, and on his lips. He wanted to gaze at that forever. He would if he could. He hoped for the chance. Abigail wheezed beneath him, the last time she'd be conscious as a human. She looked so frightened of death. Hannibal smoothed his clean hand over her forehead and her eyes rolled back into her head as she slipped into a coma.

This could definitely work very well. Very well indeed.

Chapter 10

Jack had read the reports from the Hobbs house. He knew the frightening things that traveled through Will's mind and he knew Will could handle a dead body or two, no matter how gruesome... but being a part of one was completely different. Jack had been shot before, Will had been stabbed. Only Will developed something worse than PTSD with his empathy. He received pictures of the two dead members of the Hobbs household. A dead woman with blood stained cropped blond hair staring back at him and a father, newly balding, his face hardened and his eyes already starting to cloud as rigor mortise set in. And an outline of where the Hobbs girl laid, her blood pooled all over the place and smeared across the floor as Will had knelt in it trying to plug her wound. There was too much blood for Abigail Hobbs to survive and yet she was in the hospital in a coma... however there was still time for shock to set in on her.

He traveled after work to Will's studio which had been his garage at one point, but the empath had converted it into a nice, well ventilated, and clean space to paint. He had hoped to find Will at home but only found Alana. She was cleaning up several messes through the house. Some made by spilled paint and ink, others made by the dogs who got into a few pillows. He knocked on the door and she answered, he face stone.

"Where's Will?" He asked. She only frowned and he saw her hand on the door tighten, he knuckles turning white.

"You said he wouldn't get too close." She replied and closed the door on him before he could respond.

Will had gone to the hospital to check on Abigail. He'd passed a few nurses and he could feel their eyes on him. He continued on despite the painful and terrible feeling each of their eyes gave him. He found Abigail's room and saw her hooked up to a number of machines and a tube down her throat. It hurt him to see her like this despite not knowing her at all. His eyes shifted to Hannibal, asleep and holding Abigail's hand in comfort. He hadn't left as Will's eyes traveled to his white sleeve, which was undoubtedly stained. He found himself sitting there in the chair across the bed from Hannibal. He watched for a while, the tired slow rising and falling of both Hannibal's and Abigail's chest.

It's so quiet in the room besides the mechanic sound of the ventilator that kept Abigail breathing. He felt the urge to reach out to her hand, but decided against it and held his wrist close to his chest. He leaned back in the chair and looked at this girl that both he and Hannibal had saved.

Will vaguely remembered driving home, taking more aspirin, taking a cold shower and going to bed. His head felt like an elephant was standing on it and he couldn't figure out if he had fallen asleep or if he'd been in a constant state of fevered pain for the past few hours. He figured it wasn't the latter as Hannibal was standing over him, his hand on Will's sweaty forehead, brushing his hair back. It felt reasonably real, but Hannibal didn't know where he

lived, nor were the dogs barking at the unwelcome intruder. He came to the conclusion from those things that he was dreaming or hallucinating, neither really concerned him. This was massively better than the terrible and vivid dreams he had been having the past few weeks.

Without feeling it, Will found himself standing and looking at himself in the mirror. He didn't feel like himself, what ever was looking back at him in the mirror, no matter how much it looked like him, it didn't feel like himself. He felt *wrong* and his skin felt wrong, like he was wearing some person suit. Without much logical thinking he found his hunting knife and nearly drove it into his own arm. A strong hand caught his wrist and with a tight, nearly painful squeeze he dropped it on the dresser in front of him. The grip softened then released him before wrapping their arms tightly around his front, pinning his arms to his chest.

Will leaned back into it like all the other times before and lulled his head back, onto their shoulder. He felt like he was set adrift in the same darkness that Elise Nichols brought but this was warmer, safer, gentler. The figure behind him, with their arms still wrapped around him, walked backwards, leading Will. It pulled Will down with it and sat him in what he expected would be it's lap. It felt human enough. It didn't matter that it was human, only that he felt safe. He opened his mouth as if to say something despite no words coming to mind when he tried to say them. It hushed him gently then laid Will on his side. He woke quickly and found it was 6 AM and he was still in bed. He got up in what felt like a panic and the moment he did it faded into urgent sickness. He felt off balance and ended up taking a cold shower. His alarm rang for 7 AM and he realized he had been in the shower for much long than intended, though he was no stranger of hour long showers.

He dressed himself for the day in his t-shirt and jeans. He tried to dress himself in his flannel but his fingers shook too much for him to even button it. He walked to his dresser to put it away and looked down at his hunting knife on the surface. He could have left it there... he could have sleepwalked... It could have been anything and it still terrified him that it sat there on the wood surface of his dresser where he had dreamed it had been. He shoved his jacked over his shoulders and rushed himself out of the house, unable to even look at the knife for the time being.

Will hadn't quite remembered falling asleep in Jack's car. Only that Jack had knocked on the window, waking him with a jolt. He'd forgotten where he was for a few moments before Jack spoke.

"We're here." He said and Will fought the urge to asked where 'here' was.

Will exited the warm car into the chilly fall outside world. He looked up at the wooden hunting shack in front of him and remembered where they were and why. It was old wood, likely older than Abigail herself as the wood was graying and some of it had been rotting towards the back. The downstairs wasn't anything to really gawk at. There was a gutting table, a fridge that was empty and a gun case. Photographers remained downstairs as Will and Jack made their way up the stairs and Will stopped the moment he set foot on the top step. He was mesmerized by the forest of antlers covering the walls. He couldn't see any of the wood, only the ivory bone adornments on it.

Jack slipped past him with unease and looked at the room as well though not quite as transfixed as he was horrified.

"A permanent instillation in your Evil Minds Museum..." Will said, his voice low and quiet.

"What we learn from Garret Jacob Hobbs will help us catch the next one like him... There are still seven bodies unaccounted for." Jack replied.

"Because he ate them."

Jack looked sickened. "Had to be parts he didn't eat." He said.

"Not necessarily." Will replied and walked further into the room. He wanted to reach out and touch them given the vast number, but it'd be contaminating a crime scene.

"What if he wasn't eating alone..." Jack said. "A lot of work. Killing these girls, butchering them, and then worse. All without leaving a shred of anything outside this room.

"Someone he hunted with?" Will asked.

"Or someone in a coma. Who happens to also be someone he hunted with." Jack replied.

Will's stomach twisted. He said nothing more. There was the possibility but why would Hobbs do this and Abigail allow it. He wouldn't believe it.

"Abigail Hobbs is a suspect?"

"We've been conducting some house-to-house interviews around the Hobbs residence and this property."

"What's the gossip?" Will asked, believing it was precisely that. Gossip.

"Hobbs and his daughter spent a lot of time together. They spent a lot of their time together *here*." Jack frowned. "She would be the ideal bait, wouldn't she?"

"Hobbs killed alone." Will said and looked down at the floor, his eye catching on something. His tone was definitive and Jack most certainly takes notice of where Will's attention was. He picked up the hair with his gloved fingers and Will stared at it for all but a moment.

"Someone else was here." Will said and Jack, recognizing the exact color of it knew who had invaded this crime scene.

Will had gone home to paint the dream he had the night before, or maybe just paint the feeling he had as the figure held him close. Alana walked in quickly with groceries in tow, but it wasn't the urgency of making sure that the dogs didn't scratch at her that made her walk so fast.

"Hi." Will greeted.

Alana smiled and set down the bags in the kitchen before coming back out. "How are you?" She asked.

"I have no idea." The painter replied.

"That may change. I didn't want you to be ambushed--"

"Is this an ambush?" Will asked. Alana often did bring him groceries and he always paid her back.

"Ambush is later. Immediately later, soon to now. When Jack arrives, consider yourself ambushed." She replied and Will was no less confused before he heard a knock at his screen door.

Will opened the door, not yet inviting the man in. He was his friend, but Will had some inkling about what this was about. "Hello Will." The man greeted.

"Hello Jack. This is something about my returning to the field isn't it?" Will asked.

Jack nodded. "You're up for a commendation and they okayed active return to the field."

"So I'm off the hook from the murder of Cassie Boyle?" Will asked.

"The board thinks that Hobbs did that as well as Nichols and the other 7 girls." Jack replied and Will frowned. He knew they weren't the same killer, how could someone be so stupid. The other one is still out there and they are just brushing him under the rug.

"Doctor Lecter already signed off on my papers to return to the field. The board really has no say for the moment."

"Do you really want to continue on like this?" Alana asked. "You've never killed someone before, Will. It's a deadly force encounter. It's a lot to digest."

"I used to work in homicide. I've got a good metabolism."

"You emptied a clip into him." Jack replied.

"You've already got me in therapy! What more do you want, Jack?" Will frowned, bristling at the idea of having more to talk about and more to share with Hannibal. The man was starting to become something of a friend and telling a friend you murdered someone did not appeal to him. "Goodbye Jack." He said and closed the door behind him.

"Come one, Will!! I need by beauty sleep!!!" Jack yelled exasperated behind the door before leaving.

Chapter 11

Will's fever subsided enough for him to think clearly and to Jack's thinking, just in time to see another one of the murders from his admirer and even after this one being completely clean, another popped up, then another. A sounding of three, two of them homages to his darker works, and one delving into one of his more erotic paintings. It was one he had done when just starting, a woman in pieces in resemblance to Shiva. He'd taken some influence from the pagan goddess but thought nothing of it but now seeing it in front of him, larger than life... a feeling of pride swelled in his chest and it frightened him to no end. There were several confessions and each one of them were the wrong man and just people looking for attention. Then the love letters stopped again. He'd been home alone with his dogs when the sounds started. A rough scratching in his chimney and loud whines that made him cringe. he looked up through it with a flashlight and found nothing. The sounds were incessant until they abruptly stopped. He wanted to leave it alone, but the sounds echoed in his head as he tried to go to sleep that night.

His headaches subsided along with the fever as a man from the Baltimore metropolitan orchestra went missing, though not for long. He showed up again, dead, with his throat flayed and the neck of a cello shoved into him. Will circled him as Jack had everyone clear the room. He was killed after his last performance, time of death according to that was little more than a few hours. His killer brought him back and made an instrument out of him. The man was lucky he wasn't awake as his skin was flayed and his vocal chords were played. In the autopsy his vocal chords had been treated in a matter of hours with various chemicals. Will wasn't sure when he got home, he barely remembered driving. He still had to drive to his appointment with Hannibal, coming home was a waste of time and gas. It was dark when Will arrived.

"I didn't realize how late I'd be. I should have just called to cancel." Will muttered as Hannibal opened the door.

"Nonsense. I don't mind how late you've come, as long as you have." Hannibal replied.

"I'm sure you've read about the most recent love letters to me." Will muttered. "They're becoming further and further away from my paintings but still resembling them. The last one was... something I rather he didn't recreate."

"An early work. Do you feel he was mocking you?"

"No... not quite. But... I tried to sell that painting and ended up burning it."

"Why did you burn it?"

"I was... angry at the time. I don't remember what I was angry about... only that I burned a lot of paintings. Alana said I was damn close to catching myself on fire." Will replied. "I just... try not to think about it. It's... almost frightening having someone know where your beginnings started. I was popular at the time... but... I don't know."

"He's an admirer and you have quite a few. He may have been interested in you since the beginning, but only now has he had the fuel to burn his pyre to you."

"I don't want these letters, I don't want the pyre." Will ran a shaky hand through his hair. "Every time he kills... I get a feeling of pride and it's not something I want... I don't want to feel pride that someone is killing in my name."

"I don't think he's killing in your name. Maybe he wants to see what you see. Maybe he's fascinated with your train of thought."

"Like you, doctor?"

Hannibal huffed in amusement. "My fascination with you isn't quite to the level that I'd kill for you." A complete lie. "But I do want to know you."

Will sighed and their conversation moved to their other killer, the man who played someone like the cello. Hannibal had met the man prior to his murder, and Franklyn earlier in the day had talked about Tobias in detail. It took no strain to see Tobias' fascination with Hannibal and what he was but Hannibal held no fascination for him. The man was human and Hannibal came to the conclusion as to why Tobias wanted to be so close to him. He was seeking immortality. Hannibal wasn't interesting for his own merit in Tobias' eyes, he only has something the human could gain. It tickled Hannibal that anyone could think him as someone to be manipulated, he'd have to drop by, taunt the man a bit.

He arrived under the guise of needing new strings for his harpsichord, which wasn't particularly untrue. The thing was nearly as old as him and the strings were starting to wear. It was unfortunate, but having strings made from someone's own intestines would be a novelty and amuse him whenever someone would play the instrument.

Tobias quickly recognized him as 'Franklyn's therapist', though the recognition in his eyes said something else entirely. Hannibal feigned an attempt at remembering his name. He looked around the shop.

"Your strings are all gut." Hannibal hummed and from scent alone he could tell the difference between catgut and... well human gut.

"I also carry steel and polymer strings, if you prefer." Tobias replied.

"No. I prefer gut. Harps found in the tombs of themes strung with gut still made music after 2000 years." It was a hastle to replace his steel strings every few years and though he tried polymer, the sound grated on his nerves. They spoke of the music Tobias had been playing, something mundane and boring with no life at all, but Hannibal complimented it anyway.

"It seems we're both comfortable playing between conventional notes." Hannibal said. "Too bad you don't play sliphorn. I hear the orchestra is looking for a new trombonist."

"Altogether horrible what happened." Tobias said. Hannibal could see through the sympathetic mask he put on.

"Not altogether. It's an unfortunate way to leave the symphony, yes, but I can't help thinking the orchestra will be better for it."

Tobias' mask seemed to slip in that second. He studied the doctor for a moment, realizing that he had been baited. Hannibal could barely hold back his grin.

Will had just returned home from fishing when the scratching started again. The whining and the incessant clawing to be free from the confines of his chimney. He pressed his ear to it then heard nothing. He waited a moment and threw himself back as something banged inside the chimney. Will's memory became fuzzy around the time he started tearing up the chimney. Alana had come with some paints for him and found him covered in red brick and a gaping hole in the chimney. The dogs all rested on his bed, clustered away from Will.

"What kind of animal was it?" Alana asked.

"Might have been a raccoon..." Will huffed.

"Might have been?"

"By the time I knocked a hole in the chimney, it crawled out the top."

Will could feel Alana examining him. She was worried and trying to convince herself that this wasn't Will losing it again.

"Well... at least it got out." She hummed and took up a broom to clean up.

"What are you doing out here?" Will asked.

"Thought I'd come make some noise and shoo away and predators at your door," She replied as she swept the red dust out the door. "But it seems like you were making plenty noise all by yourself."

Will chuckled quietly and found himself another broom to help Alana. They managed to clean up the mess Will made and she left without another word. There was an unspoken conversation that they should have had and Will could feel the words on his tongue but she left before anything could be done.

Hannibal had invited Tobias to a dinner specifically in planning to kill him, but rather than that, as they talked, Hannibal devised something equally as entertaining.

"Did you kill the trombonist?" Hannibal asked, though it was a terribly mundane question. He could practically smell the blood on him.

"Do you really have to ask?" Tobas replied.

"No." Hannibal hummed. "Simply changing the subject."

"Franklyn gave you my message." The doctor could feel the excitement radiating from him.

"The murder is being investigated by the FBI." Hannibal hummed. "They are going to find you."

"Let them." Tobias replied, fearlessly. Hannibal disliked his pride.

"You want to be caught?"

"I want them to try. They may question me because I own a string shop. They'd send two men to conduct and interview, I'd kill them. Then I would find Franklyn, kill him. Then I would disappear."

"Don't kill Franklyn." Hannibal had been saving him for later, just to see the look of betrayal on his face as he cut into him.

"I've been looking forward to it. Actually..." Tobias sipped his wine to hide a grin. "I was going to kill you."

"Of course you were. I'm lean. Lean animals yield the toughest gut." His dare to try was unspoken but implied.

"I make my own strings. Tell anyone who asks, it's imported."

"What stopped you from wanting to kill me?" Hannibal asked. "Or have you stopped?"

"I stopped after I followed you one night. Out of town. Out of state. To a lonely road. To a bus yard. "

Hannibal's grip on his glass tightened, just enough and it would give way in his palm. That's how Tobias knew... he suspected he hadn't been careful enough if someone like Tobias knew, but being witness to it was completely different than word of mouth.

"Have you ever wanted to get caught? To see what would happen?" Tobias asked.

"You're reckless, Tobias." Hannibal said through his teeth, though his mask did not slip.

"I’m not going to tell anyone what I saw you do and do well. So my recklessness doesn’t concern you." Tobias replied almost too casual about the whole thing.

"It concerns me because you won’t be drawing attention just to yourself." Hannibal set down his glass, all too ready to kill Tobias now. It took restraint, but he simply sat himself down.

"I could use a friend. Someone who can understand me. Who thinks like I do, and can see the world and the people in it the way I do." Tobias looked almost... hopeful.

Hannibal wasn't looking for someone to understand nor was he looking for someone who thinks like himself. He felt more than a little offended for Tobias even thinking they were alike. He'd enjoy seeing how he ended up. He might have to kill him before that happens because of what he knows. "I know exactly how you feel. But I don’t want to be your friend." He said bluntly.

Tobias took a step back. "Then why would you invite me to dinner? It wasn't just to restring your harpsichord."

"I was going to kill you." Hannibal smiled and Tobias looked to his food them back to Hannibal.

"I didn't poison you, Tobias. I wouldn't do that to the food." Hannibal meant it in the sense of what was on the plate and Tobias himself.

The door bell rung out through the house, thankfully talking Tobias' attention from him. "Are you expecting someone?" The man asked.

"No." Hannibal replied and got up to answer it, only to find Will, nervously pacing.

"I... I ripped a hole in my chimney..." Will muttered and entered without much of an invitation, though it didn't bother Hannibal much. He lead Will into the dining room, looking around for Tobias. Will noticed the half-eaten meals as Hannibal shut the garden door, locking it and pulled the shades before Will could see the footsteps in the snow outside.

"Did you have a guest?" Will asked.

"A colleague. You just missed him." Hannibal replied, though he barely would call Tobias a colleague, more of a pest.

"Didn't finish his dinner." It seemed like such a waste of good food having not cleared his plate.

"An urgent call of some sort. Had to leave suddenly. This benefits you because I have dessert for two." Hannibal could smell Alana on Will, nothing like a touch, but she was there. "Was there anyone else there while you were... ripping a hole in your chimney?"

"Alana..." Will replied.

"Tell me, what was Alana's reaction?" Hannibal asked.

"I heard an animal trapped in my chimney. I broke through the wall to get it out. Didn’t find anything inside. Alana showed up. She looked at me, maybe her face changed, I don’t know. She knew." Will replied, almost uncertain in his own head.

"What did she know, Will?" The doctor asked as he lead Will into the kitchen.

"There wasn't an animal in the chimney. It was only in my head." Will replied.

"Did she say that?"

"She didn't have to. I sleep walk. I get headaches. I'm hearing things. I feel like I'm losing my mine." Will muttered and ran a nervous hand through his hair before hugging himself. He felt unstable, like nothing was real, not even Hannibal who was just across the counter from him.

"You've said yourself that what you do is not good for you." Hannibal walked around the counter, dangerously close to Will.

"Unfortunately, I'm good at it." The empath gravitated closer to Hannibal, for something living and breathing to made him feel grounded. Will had turned himself to face Hannibal, instead of having the man at his side which made the gap before even smaller. Hannibal could barely keep his hands to himself as close as Will was to him. He could smell the encephalitis on him. He hadn't stopped it's progression, only dulled it's effects for a time, but it seemed to be coming back in full force as Will drifted closer and closer. Closer than Alana had been to him. Her scent permeated with Will's and Hannibal felt the need to remedy that. Will's hands were suddenly on his forearms and Will raised himself on the balls of his feet to touch his lips momentarily to Hannibal's. The doctor's mind went blank as the kiss felt like something he'd never thought he had. He hadn't thought anything for that moment, how he should have pulled back, how he should have not violated their doctor-patient relationship, however... he'd already done that by being Will's friend. He impulsively kissed back, his hand pressed to the back of Will's neck for a moment before Hannibal came to his senses. He could play with this, see where he could take this and how far he could push Will, he could use this.

He broke off the kiss and Will looked up at him for a moment, his eyes half lidded before reality seemed to rush back all to quickly. Will lowered himself then took a step back. "I... I don't know what I was... I was..." He seemed confused with his own actions as much as Hannibal was. Will stuttered over his words. "I-I think I need to..." Was was quite ready to run and never look back, but he remembered what Alana has said to him the moment he had kissed her in a moment like this. "I wouldn’t be good for you. You wouldn’t be good for me. 'We' wouldn’t be good for either of us." Will muttered then took a few more steps back, more than arms length from Hannibal.

"I understand." Hannibal said, his face sympathetic, however, internally he wanted to have his lips on Will's in a heartbeat. "You kissed me in a moment of instability... I won't hold you to any romantic obligation. You needed something to ground you... it is after all what I'm here for."

Will nodded, looking both relieved and conflicted. "I should probably go... I need to... to feed my dogs."

"Will, before you leave..." Hannibal feigned reluctance. "I hesitate telling you this as it borders on a violation of doctor-patient confidentiality. I’ve never been in this position before. A patient told me today he suspects a friend of his may be involved with the murder at the symphony."

Will, being back in his own head space, seemed better and quite interested. "What did he say about his friend?"

"He owns a music store in Baltimore, specializing in string instruments. Perhaps you should interview him." Hannibal replied and as Will grabbed his coat and headed out the door. He pressed a finger to his lips, committing yet another memory to mind. He'd have it again, not soon, but he would have it again at some point.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"For the first time in a long while I see a possibility of friendship. Maybe even something more than that." Hannibal said, leaning back into the plush chair in Bedelia's office. The woman looked back from a glass of wine she had been pouring.

"Is there someone new in your life?" She asked. She'd recalled the last time he considered the possibility of a relationship, the woman she was now was a product of that ambition.

"I met a man much like myself, same hobbies, same world views. But I'm not interested in being his friend. I'm a borderline obsession of his. He knows what I am and sees it as something to gain. He sees me as someone he can use. But I'm curious about him and that got me curious about friendship."

"That's progress..." Bedelia picked up her glass and circled the room to her chair opposite from Hannibal. "I always considered you an individualist. The social anti-social."

"A polite way of saying sociopath?" It was less of a question and more of a statement.

"I'm not sure how to categorize you in those terms. And I think you prefer it that way."

"I'm afraid once you figure me out, you'll lose interest."

It had taken Bedelia years to even get this far and at the cost of her own life, her curiosity always won her over instead of her self preservation.

"Whose... *friendship* are you considering?" She asked.

"Oddly enough, a colleague and a patient. Not unlike how I am a colleague and a patient of yours. We've discussed him before."

"Will Graham." She hummed. The poor boy had no idea what he was getting himself into by associating himself with Hannibal. She'd read about him and the unfortunate case of the Hobbs family. An unstable twitchy little man with no family to speak of.

"He's nothing like me. We see the world in different ways, yet he can assume my point of view." Hannibal leaned forward in his seat. "He's already done it once."

"How as he demonstrated it?"

A smile played on Hannibal's features. "I've found myself... attracted to him in a way that is... more lustful than anything else. He came to me the other night, sick and worried. He'd had an auditory hallucination feared a friend of his knew he was losing his mind. In a moment of instability, he didn't quite control his empathy in the way he normally did. He kissed me in the way I wanted to kiss him."

"I'm assuming that want to be close to him... was your own?"

Hannibal simply gave a curt nod and all Bedelia could think was 'Poor boy.'

"It's nice to have someone see us, Hannibal. Or have the ability to see us. It requires trust. Trust isn't easy for you."

"You mean, behind the veil?"

She stared. It was exactly what she had meant.

"You've helped me to better understand what I want in this... relationship. And what I don't."

"Someone worthy of your *friendship.*" The word worthy rung true to Hannibal. She could see it clearly.

"Yes." Hannibal replied.

"You spend a lot of time building walls, Hannibal. It's natural to want to see if anyone is clever enough to climb over them." Bedelia had tried in her curiosity and the moment she had reached the top, she fell into an ocean she could never get out of again. The monsters there swallowed her whole and the woman she was now was what came out of it.

Will's headaches had returned in full force. He couldn't even eat this morning and the fact that he'd already taken multiple aspirin on his empty stomach didn't help how he felt. He entered the string shop Hannibal had mentioned the night before, with two police officers at his flanks. The bell ringing above the door hurt Will's ears but he refused to flinch at the sound. Tobias, their suspect had been escorting out one of his cello students. After the kid left, Will introduced himself.

"I'm Special Agent Will Graham with the FBI. Are you the owner?"

"Yes, Tobias Budge. What can I help you with?"

"We're investigating the death of Douglas Wilson. He was a--"

"The trombonist." Tobias was quick to reply.

"Did you know him?"

"I was aware of him. Baltimore is a small town and its cultural arts community is even smaller."

"That's why we're here." Will watched Tobias carefully as he walked around his shop, adjusting displays and strings alike.

"I hear someone cut his throat and tried to play it with a bow."

"Why do you say try?"

"Strings have to be treated. You can't just open somebody up and run a bow across their innards and expect to produce a sound."

Will frowned as his mind replayed the haunting tone that played out when he reconstructed the crime scene. "The vocal chords were chemically treated, similar to how catgut strings are treated. We kept those details out of the press."

"Looking for someone who knows how to manufacture gut strings?"

"Anyone leap to mind?"

Tobias picked up a bundle of catgut and handed it to Will. The empath didn't bother looking at them, he kept his eyes on Tobias.

"Mine are imported from Italy. Best catgut is. The String section of the Baltimore Metro refuses to play anything else."

"More authentic..." Will muttered.

"A richer, darker sound. Allows music to say what words can't."

Will jumped as he heard a sickening thud and the pained cry from a dog outside. His stomach turned and he tried to look out the window, taking his eyes off Tobias for the first time since he walked in.

"Something wrong?" Tobais asked.

"Sounded... sounded like a dog got hit by a car. You didn't hear it?" Will asked.

"I didn't hear anything." An officer said and he looked to the other officer who simply shook his head and shrugged. Will flinched again at another whimpered cry.

"Excuse me a minute." Will crossed the room quickly and out the front door. He walked directly into the street, looking around in circles for the dog he'd heard and yet there was nothing. Everything suddenly seemed so loud and he quickly came back to his senses to narrowly avoid getting hit by a bus. Will felt eyes on him but he kept moving back to the sidewalk. He took more aspirin as his head felt like it was on fire. He looked down at the ground for a moment, the feeling of panic settling over him. Was he really losing his mind?

He finally entered back into the string shop. "Sorry about that. I--" he looked around and the store was completely empty. "Officers? *Officers!*" Will's panic spread into more dangerous places. He picked up the phone on the checkout counter and called for backup as the entire shop seemed too quiet, too empty. Will stepped behind the counter and into the private lesson room in the back. There was one of the officers, tumbled over the piano bench, with a cello rod jammed under his neck through the top of his head. Will quickly pulled his gun as he heard a blunt scratching noise. He found a staircase to a basement and the sound seemed to echo through the dark. He slowly descended and in the dark, Will hugged the wall until he eyes adjusted to the dim blue light of the room. The smell had already hit him before he could even see the strings, but he knew. Tobias was making his own catgut strings.

Ropes of intestine seemed to run the length of the room, drying. Some laying in waterbaths, others laying dry and ready for use. It was horrible and the sound of scratching continued. Will stepped forward and nearly slipped. He glanced down to see what he had stepped in and it was a pool of blood with a badge clearly belonging to the second officer in it. Will's stomach turned.

He threw back the opaque curtain in front of him to find the officer on his knees, only supported by a series of razor sharp wire strings. Will didn't have to look to know that they dug into his neck, face, and eyes. The scratching had been his hand swinging against the concrete of the floor. Will quickly saw a blur of movement to his left, but when he turned, there was nothing, no sound but the scratching until the sound of breathing behind him. Will raised his arm over his face and throat as Tobias attempted to strangle him with wire. Instead it all cut into his arm and hands, ruining his jacket and nearly tearing chunks of flesh free. The pain made Will sick as he struggled to bring his gun up to his attacker. The moment it's up far enough he pulled the trigger and it was deafening. His ears rang, but he'd suspected he's managed to hit Budge when the wire released him and he fell to the ground. Will looked behind him to see budge clutching his ear and the moment Will raised his gun to fire again, Tobias was already moving and running out of sight. Will fired but only a moment too late as he rushed up the stairs. Will sat there on the ground, tired, pained and all but ready to collapse. The ringing in his ears dulled and he could hear the ringing of sirens. Hannibal had been right.

Franklyn had been counting something. Hannibal wasn't sure at this point. He'd stopped listening.

"Nine times. I can count on two hands the number of times I've been dumped by a psychiatrist." The man said.

"I'm sorry, Franklyn. I think it's best if you see another doctor." Hannibal huffed. This had been going for the majority of their session and frankly, he was bored with it.

"You're giving me a referral."

"Yes."

"*You* were a referal!"

"I'm also part of the problem. You focus to much on your therapist, not your therapy."

"You lost respect for me because I wouldn't report Tobias, didn't you?" Frankly asked, though Hannibal never respected him in the first place.

"Report Tobias for what?" Said a voice Hannibal had been waiting to hear. Will had gone... but if Tobias was here...

Franklyn stood up quickly, guilty and afraid. Hannibal stood as well and turned to the man. Tobias was bloody, Hannibal would smell Will on him, smell Will's blood mixed with Tobias' own.

"I came to say goodbye, Franklyn." Tobias said.

"What do you mean goodbye?" Oh my god! Is that your blood?" Franklyn gasped.

"I just killed two men. The FBI came to question me about the murder."

Hannibal had never felt true anger. Maybe aggravation, but this was something else entirely. Franklyn's own voice grating on him and the thought of Will possibly being dead...

"You have to turn yourself in. This plane is going down! Let it be a controlled descent. You can get back up in the air again. There is rehabilitation for everyone."

"Franklyn. I want you to leave now."

"Stay right where you are, Franklyn."

The man stepped forward, trying to calm the man he'd thought was his friend. "You've done something horrible and I know you wish to god you didn't, but you did and there's nothing you can do to change that. Only thing you can change is your future. You're probably scared. Probably feel like you're all alone."

"I'm not alone." Tobias said, his eyes drifting to Hannibal.

"That's right. You're not alone. Nothing has happened in our friendship that you and I can't recover from." Franklyn seemed so hopeful right until the moment Hannibal snapped his neck. He dropped to the ground with a heavy thud. Definitely not a controlled decent.

"I was looking forward to that." Tobias muttered.

"I know." Hannibal replied and turned as the shrill sound of the phone grabbed his attention. Hannibal had circled the room with Tobias until he could reach the phone. He calmly picked it up and slammed it into Tobias' head. He was all too ready to kill Tobias now, but simply slaughtering would ruin Hannibal's place here. Tobias was too confident with himself, but he came prepared. Silver piano wire, of course. Tobias swung it at him and Hannibal raised his arm to block it, the entirety of the wire digging into his flesh. Despite it's sting, Hannibal moved quickly to utilize the wire in this fight. He let Tobias hit him a few times before Hannibal used his own weight to trap Tobais' arm in the ladder of his library. He quickly shattered the bone in his arm and as Tobais tried to fight back Hannibal punched him square in the throat, positively crushing his wind pipe. He was tempted to watch him suffocate, he didn't. He lifted the stag statue that sat on it's pedestal and crushed Tobias' skull with it. He knocked over the pedestal it had been resting on and sat himself in the chair at his desk. Blood permeated through the room, but Hannibal was sickened. He could smell Will on Tobias and he feared the worst. The decided it best to call the police once he got his blood lust under control.

Hannibal still sat in his desk chair as his entire office became an active crime scene. A paramedic had bandaged his arm, which would take some time to heal as the wire had been silver. It would likely even scar, which was rare. His attention jerked to the door as Will

stepped through it with Jack at his side. Will was just as bandaged if not more than Hannibal. The wire had cut Will's face and his arm. He had no jacket and his sleeves were rolled up and Hannibal could see the full extent of the the damage. He'd never smelt anything so sweet and yet... he couldn't help the pang of relief that flooded through him as Will walked towards him.

The empath looked down at the bloody statue next to Tobias' body, visibly ill, yet satisfied that the man was dead. Hannibal smiled softly at Will, his relief permeating outward. "Mr. Budge said he was questioned by the FBI and he murdered two men. I was worried you were dead."

Will lifted his arm for a moment. "You had reason to worry." He flinched as the bandages and likely the stitches pulled on his arm and Hannibal sympathetically lifted his won injured arm. Jack walked to look down at Tobias then to Hannibal.

"Tobias Budge kills two Baltimore Police Officers, nearly kills an FBI Special Agent, and after all that his first stop is your office." He seemed terribly suspicious... he had reason to be.

"Hannibal’s patient told him he suspected a friend was involved with the murder at the symphony. Hannibal told me and I investigated. I got him involved." Will replied in Hannibal's defense. "Your patient. Is that who Tobias Budge was serenading?"

"I don’t know. Franklyn knew more than he was telling me. He told Mr. Budge he didn’t have to kill anymore. Then he broke Franklyn’s neck. Then he attacked me."

"And you killed him." Jack huffed.

Hannibal feigned sadness in Franklyn's death as it was placed in a body bag and wheeled out of the room. "Yes." He replied.

"Could your patient’ve been involved with any of what Budge was doing?" Will asked.

"I thought this was a matter of poor choice in friends." Hannibal replied.

Jack eyed Hannibal, then Will and sighed. He turned his attention to the crime scene as both Franklyn and Tobias are wheeled out. "This doesn't feel simple." The older man sighed and moved away to study the rest of the crime scene. Will sat on the edge of the desk and took gauze from the med kit the paramedic had left and dabbed at Hannibal's split lip. "I feel like I've dragged you into my world." He muttered.

Hannibal smiled, though at the cost of making his lip bleed more. "I got here on my own." He replied. "Thought I appreciate the company."

Will returned the smile and all Hannibal could think is how utterly beautiful this man was.

Chapter End Notes

AH MA GAHD LOOK AT ALL THIS PINING! THIS BOY IS IN LURV!!!!!

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

> Hi! I'm back for the time being. I'm sorry it's been a year...
> My computer broke and simply put, I don't have internet anywhere but on my phone so enjoy and sorry if it is short, it looks longer on my phone.

Hannibal had begun to watch Will more intently during the night. It gave him something to do in what seemed to be unending wakefulness that only ended when he had fed. Since meeting Will he's only done so twice, he'd never fed from those he made into art, into Will's art. The encephalitis was getting worse by the day, damn Mason and his ability for pestulence. Will had been 'infected' by Mason through a simple handshake and now, Mason had a great deal of control over Will. The attempts to kill him each time were thwarted by Hannibal and the blood he'd been sharing with Will. This time, Will had risen from bed, eyes barely open. Hannibal gently made his way into the house as a dark, nearly smoke-like mist. It made it easier to conceal himself should Will wake too soon. Will had headed into his kitchen, another knife taken, much larger this time. He simply examined it for a time, turning it in his hand, contemplating everything he could do to himself, rather what Mason was telling him to do to himself.

Hannibal gently came up behind Will, sliding his hand from Will's shoulder to his wrist, gentle, feather light touches, yet with an iron grip he took the knife away. Will was deteriorating quickly, he'd yet to break from the spell and Hannibal could tell the moment Will had pulled away, simply walking past Hannibal and 9ut the front door into the dead winter that covered his property. Hannibal followed Will, keeping him just warm enough to travel as far as he liked, which wasn't far until police had found him. He disguised himself as Winston, one of Will's smartest dogs and Will was none the wiser. The officer asked his questions, put Will and his dog into the back of the cruiser and brought him home. The whole ride, Will clung to 'Winston'.

With Will safely back inside, Hannibal moved into his human form, following Will ever so quietly and when Will did not go back to sleep, Hannibal remedied that. He'd simply whispered into Will's ear as he stood there for him to sleep, the man dropped almost instantly, however, Hannibal was there to catch him and lift the man into his arms.

"Oh, my dear Will..." he began softly, laying the man down and covering him with a heavy comforter. "What am I going to do with you?" He had cut his wrist for Will, taken his own blood into his mouth and pushed for Will to drink. Pressing his lips over his darlings own and like so many nights before, Will did exactly as Hannibal wanted him to. It was no solution, but it kept Mason at bay, giving Will just enough power to resist, but only so long the blood was in his system. When Hannibal pulled back, Will's eyes opened, barely seeing. An unfortunate effect of vampiric blood was that all spells put upon humans has their effect

diminished, even Hannibal's sleeping spell. But the effect was only diminished so much as Will was still half-asleep.

"Han..." Will said quietly, the other half of the doctor's name caught in a whisper. Hannibal hushed him, gently pressing his finger to Will's lips. He removed it to replace it with his lips, granting himself a true kiss before he took his leave. Will gently returned it, a hand moving to clutch Hannibal's wrist ever so lightly. "Sleep, mano meile." He simply said, pushing Will into a deeper sleep. Will closed his eyes and went limp under Hannibal and the monster left as he had come in. He'd watch for longer, hut the sun was soon to rise and Will would sleep through two alarms until he woke at 8 AM. Hannibal wished to see his beloved wake, but not today. He had other plans, plans that would remedy this problem once and for all.

Will woke to 16 missed calls and 10 voicemails from Jack. He groaned quietly and called the man back, which was met with Jack yelling so loudly, Will could barely translate what he was saying. There had been another love letter, one based off one of his lesser known works. A man gutted by his own dolls, strung up like a marionette to dance. The crime scene was a man, strung up by piano wire, still and lifeless, yet poised for movement. There were no dolls but a great number of flowers once again, each meaning more intimate than the last. Beauty, sacrifice, pain, love, empathy. Whoever this was knew about his empathy disorder... or maybe was asking for empathy. Will did not stay long as the small sense of pride he had felt made him sick. Too sick. He trembled as he had turned to find somewhere to empty his stomach but found himself hallucinating again. The shadows on the ground danced around him as his head pounded like a drum. He couldn't.. couldn't... he collapsed. He heard Jack's muffled voice, yelling to him. He felt rough hands on his shoulders, shaking him, then he felt nothing, nothing but the pain in his head.

Will woke in the hospital, barely coherent. He looked around sluggishly and found Hannibal, asleep and holding his hand ever so gently. He squeezed the man's hand in hopes of waking him up, but to no avail. He was out again in a matter if seconds. The scond time, he found Alana, pacing the half of the room at the foot of his bed and looked back to see no Hannibal. He stomach flipped as he felt disappointment. "Ala...na..." he muttered and it seemed he was just loud enough to snap her out of her worried daze. She rushed to his side, taking his hand in her own, but her voice was muffled. He didn't understand what she was saying. It was like someone shoved cotton balls in his ears. He closed his eyes as she spoke and faded off again, somewhere else, some where where he could hear a name being called.

Hannibal, who sat in the cafeteria, sipping some terrible coffee, hand felt Will's mind pull on his own. It had shocked him enough for him to crush the paper cup in his hand. He'd felt the burn, but it disapeared quickly enough. He hadn't thought to clean up his mess before walking very quickly to Will's room. Though not before drying his hand. He'd found Alana, teary eyed and worried. "What happened?" He asked the woman.

"He woke up but... he just looked like he didn't even know who I was. He wasn't listening. He faded so quickly..." she sobbed and moved to Hannibal's chest for comfort. He simply smoothed a hand over her hair in half an attempt.

"He's on anticonvulsants, painkillers and antivirals. You can't just expect him to be coherent. It's only been a few days. Give him time." Hannibal replied, that seemed to work for her as she simply sighed and pulled away.

"I... I knew something was wrong. He'd been acting... stranger than normal, paranoid and afraid. I didn't... I didn't think it was this." She took a shakey intake of breath. "I think I need to go home, take care of his dogs."

"I'll watch him, go." Hannibal simply said and she'd left soon after. She planted a kiss on Will's forehead and left without another word.

Hannibal sat down in the chair he had moved to Will's side. He took the man's hand in his own again and let his mind reach toward Will's and the man replied in a wordless voice, conveying emotion. Relief, longing, fear. Hannibal squeezed Will's hand, hoping to let him know he was there and the longing subsided. The fear, however, had stuck. Fear of what? Fear for his life? Fear of the unknown? Fear of Hannibal? It could be so many things.

It was another day until Will opened his eyes again, this time with the vague taste of iron in his mouth. He'd wondered if he's bitten his tongue in his sleep, but he felt no pain, so he was uncertain. He felt more alert than he had in days. He opened his eyes to the gentle morning sunrise, his hand back in Hannibal's who was now awake. "Will." He said softly.

"What happened...?" Will asked, his voice quiet.

"You collapsed at a crime scene. You had us worried... you've been away from us for a week." Hannibal replied. "How do you feel?"

"Tired... but better. My head doesn't hurt... I can finally think clearly... well, as clearly as I could before all this shit happened."

Hannibal simply smiled and all Will could think was how lovely it would be to kiss that face. He quickly shook the thought.

"They diminished your painkillers by half. There was only two ways it could go, I'm glad it went towards the positive." Hannibal squeezed Will's hand. The man hadn't gone towards the positive, not really. Will had been in for a night full of pain had Hannibal not helped. "If all goes well, you should be out by Tuesday." The doctor said.

"That's good.... Um, what day is today?" Will asked.

"Saturday."

"Okay, good. Only been out of it a full week. I actually feel a lot better... though it feels like I've been sucking on a penny." Will huffed.

"The antivirals will do that." Hannibal lied. "Coffee to wash it away?"

"I'd love some. The only headache I have now is a caffeine headache." Will hummed and Hannibal got up to leave, his hand slipping from Will's and he felt the loss. Will didn't want to be left alone in a hospital bed. He'd already been in the hospital one too many times this

year. As if Hannibal had heard Will's pleading he simply turned with a soft smile and said, "I'll be right back."

Monday came and Will was released, though Alana had volunteered to take care of him and make sure he continued taking anti-convulsants and to watch and make sure he wasn't rekindling his dependence on aspirin. Will hated it. He didn't like being a burden and Alana had so much to do already. She was his manager, a psychiatrist, and she had a life of her own to take care of. Will had become tired of being a burden, but he did his best to make this as easy on Alana as possible. He listened when he needed to take his medication and she made sure to keep him on his regular schedule that kept him comfortable. The new love letter was scanned for details and evidence and like before, none were found. The flowers were hand grown, but no fingerprints, no soil samples as they had been cut and they'd been watered with distilled water that can be store bought anywhere. Nothing.

On Friday, Alana had a date with a girl named Margot, which Will thought sounded familiar. It was nice to see Alana putting herself out there and Will was excited to have some alone time and to feel like less of a burden on the woman. He felt that way right up until Alana said that Hannibal would be coming to, as Alana put it, help out. Will had dragged Alana into the back room, having a very firm but muffled conversation about how he already was fine, why did he need someone to still look after him? The encephalitis was gone, he had no more headaches, he only had the one seizure that put him in the hospital to which Alana replied and told him he'd had three while he was unconscious, so that shut Will right up. Alana then proceeded to leave Will with a simple kiss on the cheek and a wave goodbye.

Will sighed and followed Alana out and saw her off. He went back inside and let the dogs out. He looked over the house, realizing, compared to Hannibal, he was a mess. The most organized things he had were his fly-fishing gear, his drawers and to some extent, the shed he paints in. In a rush he organized the dog beds, made his own bed with new sheets, swept and cleaned his small kitchen. When Hannibal arrived he could smell the chemical cleaner from a mile away. It was quite strong, but he felt flattered that Will had cleaned for his visit. He exited the car and Will walked out to meet him, shocked to see Hannibal not in a three piece suit but a simple maroon sweater with a fancy-ish sweatshirt over it and his regular nice looking black coat. He actually looked... well still over dressed but less so than normal.

Hannibal pulled a couple bags from his back seat, groceries and from the look of it, really nice alcohol. "You didn't have to do all this." Will said quickly and walked to take the bag of groceries.

"I think I do. From what I've from Alana, you've been eating nothing but fast food and frozen meals. You can't subsist off that alone." Hannibal replied and Will rolled his eyes and made the note to tell Alana to shove it and never talk to anyone about Will again. "Plus I think a little breakfast for dinner never hurt anyone."

"Fine, but I get to help. I can't just have you here taking over my kitchen." Will replied. "And if you need any meat or something... I've got some fresh fish in the freezer."

"It'd make a good lunch." Hannibal said simply.

"You're not suggesting..." Will paused. "Oh my god, Alana asked you to stay the night."

"She did, which I am more than happy to stay. You are my friend after all." As he said that Hannibal could practically smell the blush coming from Will as blood rose to the surface of his skin. Hannibal didn't need to look to know.

Will had opened the door and the dogs had taken it as their queue to come inside and scramble past Will's legs to lay in front of the heater. They nearly knocked him down had it not been for Hannibal currently holding Will up with one arm. Will would have caught Hannibal had it not been for the groceries he was currently holding on to for dear life. "Uh, they're not usually like this." Will said and stood with the help of Hannibal. He rushed inside away from him to put away the groceries and will his embarrassment away. He pulled out fresh eggs, herbs, spices, what looked like bacon (though it was wrapped in paper so he couldn't be sure) and sausage. "I'm never going to want to cook again if everything looks this good." Will said and physically jolted when he felt Hannibal's hand lightly brush his hip bone to pass him.

"And I would never deny you any of my meals. In fact, you're one of my favorite people to cook for. You appreciate all of it, not simply one thing." Hannibal replied. "Pans?"

"Cabinet to your left. Don't use the one on the very bottom, it's cheep and sticks. So, you like it because I can't judge how you cook? I can barely cook myself, I barely survive on my own as Alana seemed to put it."

Hannibal smiled and let out an amused huff though his nose. "Well, if it is true, I do plan on not letting you simply survive, but I do enjoy indulging you."

Will was quiet for a moment and decided to switch the subject quickly. "So, what did you bring to drink?" He asked, moving to pick up the bottle out of it's brown paper bag.

"Scotch." Hannibal replied.

"You're over simplifying it... knowing you, it's probably at least a thousand dollars." Will huffed, slightly aggravated that he couldn't read the words on the worn label.

"It's from my cellar, I'm not much of a scotch drinker so I supposed you'd enjoy it." Hannibal pulled a pan from the cluttered cabinet and weighed it in his hand, it was suitable and quite nice given how Will ends up living. It was cast iron, aged and well taken care of.

"You did strike me as a wine type."

"I am, but that does not mean I won't drink with you." He set the pan down and placed the bacon in it with the flame on high, he planned to fry the eggs in the fat. He then left it to fry and took the bottle from Will. "Glasses?"

Will moved and opened a liquor cabinet to pull out a couple of crystal glasses and put some ice in them and Hannibal poured them both two fingers. "A toast?" He asked.

"To what?"

"Friendship and good scotch?"

"That'll work." Will smiled and raised his glass before sipping it and honestly, Hannibal was not wrong. It was the best scotch that he'd ever had and that's not saying much given everything he tended to drink was pretty cheep. Hannibal smiled and the crows feet around his eyes enamored Will. "Bacon." He said, simply reminding Hannibal who seemed to have his same problem. The man moved in no rush and moved to pull what had been cooking from the pan to a plate and to cook the rest of what was left.

"I've never found myself forgetting I was cooking until you." Hannibal chuckled.

"Maybe I'm a bad influence?" Will smirked.

"You have no idea."

Chapter 14

Dinner was a quick affair of Will simply feeding Hannibal's ego, raving about how good the food was and how he'd truly never cook again had he only full time access to Hannibal, to which the older man had no issue with, though he kept that opinion to himself. Between the two of them, they polished off half the bottle of one of the most expensive scotches that Hannibal had owned. Will was worth it, even if he ended up drinking it like Jack Daniels towards the end of the night. They'd been talking about fishing or... something like that. Will, being buzzed tended to jump subjects quite often. An alarm on Hannibal's phone went off, it was an alarm given to him by Alana to make sure Will took his medication every day and Will knew exactly what time it was. His face turned red with embarrassment and anger at his friend for making Hannibal a glorified baby sitter. He simply sighed before Hannibal had a chance to even say anything and rose from the couch, making his way towards the bathroom to take his pills, and Will was on so many. A few he even shouldn't be taking in Hannibal's opinion. Anti-consultants, needed. Last of the Anti-virals, needed. Mood enhancers, unneeded. Mood-stabilizers, unneeded. Hannibal made a mental note to see who was prescribing these heavy medications and promptly... deal with them, though quietly. He needn't get too close to Will in his art, simply to feed his boy's pride.

He put the bottle of scotch away in Will's liquor cabinet for later indulgence and as a gift Will would no doubt call about and ask Hannibal if he'd meant to leave the thousand dollar bottle of scotch. Hannibal would reply with an of course and Will would complain about over indulgence, though indulging Will was one of Hannibal's few joys in life. Maybe, he might even bring Will to the opera. It would give him a good excuse to buy the man a fitted suit. Something dark, red maybe. It would make those icey blue-green eyes stand out well. Red, Hannibal realized, was his favorite color on Will. He'd learned this the day that Abigail Hobbs 'died'. The memory surfaced and Hannibal got to watch it all over again. The red staining his shirt, splattering across his glasses, framing his face perfectly. He was drawn from his thoughts when Will exited from the bathroom.

"You don't have to stay. I know Alana invited you to... but you're not obligated." Will said. What a shy boy he was. A smile reached Hannibal's eyes.

"I know I don't. But I want to. I wish to spend time with you, Will, However hard that may be for your to believe." Hannibal replied.

"I'm just tired of being a burden."

"Are you sure that's what you're tired of, Will? Couldn't it be the constant watchfulness of your close friends? Jack and Alana treat you like a fragile tea cup, used only for special guests."

"The both of them..." Will sighed and rubbed his eyes briefly. "Yes. I'm not fragile... so... I'm tired of that too."

"Indeed you aren't fragile and you certainly aren't a teacup. But you need to let yourself realize what it is that *you* want and not what others want of you, Will."

Will was then silent. He had thought they'd see him as a burden, so he wanted to become better as quickly as possible for their benefit. Will is stronger than he can give himself credit for. Hannibal had known Mason had him under his spell the moment they'd met, however, the first time Mason had attempted anything, it was all Will who saved himself. The car crash. Mason had paid for the Taxi, Mason had taken control of the driver and Will to keep them in the worst situation possible. Will had the sense about him to drag himself from the wreck, though broken glass, barely conscious, heavily concussed. Will was much stronger, but over time, Mason's power grew over Will, eventually overpowering Will's mental walls. Will had mentioned something about forts and it would seem that it would indeed be hard to break them down, but... it wasn't something Hannibal was inexperienced with. He'd pull Will apart beautifully.

The night passed quickly and soon Will had simply fallen asleep mid-conversation, tired and buzzed. Hannibal moved quietly, kneeling in front of the man and running the back of his hand along Will's cheek bone, sating his need to touch Will for now. He snapped his fingers a couple times and moved to pick Will up and place him in bed. It would be better this way should Mason still have any power over him, though he doubted it. But that only meant that Mason would come himself, rekindle the bond and attempt his control again.

"I'm sorry, my dear Will. This will be unpleasant for you." He said quietly, tilting Will's head back and exposing his throat. If Mason were to come for Will again, he would know that Will belonged to Hannibal and Hannibal only. Should he encroach on the man's territory... well, Hannibal has threatened before to feed Mason to his pigs.

Hannibal bit down roughly, startling will awake, but the man wouldn't remember this. Hannibal would make sure of it. Will gasped to yell but Hannibal's hand over his mouth stopped any sound from escaping. The sounds of Will's gasping died down to small sounds, notably of numbing pleasure. Hannibal pulled away before he could take too much and simply kissed from the wound, over Will's face and to his lips. He pulled away before Will, in his inebriated state could reciprocate. He looked down at his shy boy and spoke ever so softly.

"Forget, Will." He said and Will's eyes fell closed. Hannibal had wanted more from Will, more specifically... he wished he hadn't have had to stop. "You truly are a bad influence on me, Will."

Will tasted better than Hannibal would have ever thought, however, it was nearing the point of no return when Hannibal stopped. It's enough for now. He checked over his Will for any remnants of blood and found none and also found the wound already closing, it would be gone by the morning. He placed one last kiss upon Will's lips and laid down on the couch and as uncomfortable as it may be, Hannibal slept well.

Will dreamed of fire, smoke, and sex. White hot pain spread through him and was quickly replaced with white hot heat, traveling through him. He felt phantom hands on him, more than just two at a time, but no solid body behind him or in front of him. Just the touches,

some feather light and teasing, some grabbing and taking. Will felt like he couldn't breathe, it was too much and it wasn't the hand he recognized before. He didn't feel safe, he felt wrong, violated and everything around him burned and yet, with the light, he couldn't bear to look down. Then with a howling screech, the hands stopped, left his body and he was enveloped in warmth and darkness. Arms very gently wrapped around him, two this time, feeling human. He felt the familiar pressure at his back and his head lulled back as it had before on to their shoulder. "My dear Will..." It said in a very familiar voice, "You're safe. He can't hurt you anymore."

"*He?*" Will asked, barely at a whisper.

They didn't seem to listen. "You're safe. You're mine now... he has no power here anymore."

"Where is here?" Will asked and he felt them grin against his shoulder. It opened its mouth to speak and Will woke.

He had slept through the night, even with the strange dream. He felt mildly sore from the neck up, but it wasn't uncommon for him to move so hard in his sleep that he pulled something. He found Hannibal asleep on the couch, Daisy (a short yet fat terrier) had found her way behind his legs, sleeping in a ball. It was out of character for the dog to say the least and seeing Hannibal, curled up on a couch with a dog cuddling him was totally unexpected. It looked so out of the ordinary. He didn't know how much Hannibal would apreciate a dog using him as a heater, so Will very quietly moved Daisy. He then left for a shower, spending just over an hour in a mildly-scalding rinse and when he came out, he found Hannibal making preparations to make breakfast. He'd pulled out the eggs, some tomatoes, and a bit of ham that Will didn't know Hannibal had brought with him.

"Good Morning." Hannibal greeted him, looking like he had slept well as his hair was slightly out of place, but... only slightly. Will wanted to mess it up more.

"Morning. Breakfast again?" Will teased.

Hannibal simply smiled and turned back to the pan. "We could have had fish for breakfast, but I'm sure the smell would have ruined the surprise... though your shower was much shorter than I'd hoped it would be."

"You wanted to surprise me with breakfast?"

"Well, I was hoping to have it on the table when he you exited."

"Sorry, should I go back in?"

"No. You can help by setting the table." Hannibal replied with a small chuckle.

Will did so, though he hadn't used the table in a while. The only thing it was used for was a place for him to build frames and it was evident what it was used for by the deep scratches, nail marks, and screws embedded in the table that Will always told himself he would take out but never did. If Hannibal were to come over more often, Will considered actually

undertaking the task. Hannibal had found the plates quite quickly, only looking through a couple cabinets. He then plated the omelettes, which looked perfect as always.

"Maybe one day you'll have to teach me to cook something, that way I have something to impress Alana with or Jack to bribe with." Will said while placing the silverware.

Hannibal set down the omelettes in their respective spots and gestured for Will to sit. "It'd be an honor to have you in my kitchen, Will." He smiled. "Now eat your breakfast. We can speak about it more at a later time."

Will sat quickly and dug into the meal that Hannibal had made. It was just as good as yesterday's dinner and once again, Will was sure that he was feeding Hannibal's ego... not that he had any problem doing so. He liked when Hannibal smiled... he liked watching Hannibal work. Will was snapped from his thoughts at the dogs barking and the opening of the screen door. He turned his head much to quickly and gave himself whiplash, which didn't help the fact that his neck was already sore, he most definitely slept on it wrong.

Alana entered, looking radiant as ever, with a bit more of a glow to her to which grinned at. Her fact turned a slight red and she quickly turned her attention to Hannibal who had greeted her.

"How was your night?" Will asked.

"Good." Alana replied. "Really good. Thanks for... spending some time with Will, Hannibal." Will knew exactly what word was supposed to be. 'Thanks for *watching* Will.' He frowned slightly at it, quickly occupying his attention with his breakfast.

"We had a good night." Hannibal replied, a smile reaching his eyes. "I'm sorry I did not expect you back so early after you didn't come back last night. I would have made you breakfast."

"Oh, don't worry about it." She said. "Margo and I had ourselves a little coffee date this morning so I'm good."

Simultaneously, all of their phones seemed to ring. Will's stomach dropped as reality set back in and he realized quickly that this wasn't what his life was like. "It would seem Jack needs all three of us..." Will said, looking down at his half finished plate. He wasn't even hungry anymore, he knew what was coming. Alana gave Will a sad smile and Will didn't want her pity. He looked at his phone quietly and stood, walking to put his shoes on and pull on a coat. "I'm sorry... Jack will probably call me more than you, so to avoid him yelling at me... I'm gonna leave first." He said and walked out, his emotionless mask put back in place.

Alana's eyes followed him out and her brow furrowed in worry. "It'd been a while since I saw that side of Will. You're a really good influence on him... but as they say... 'no rest for the wicked'." She said.

"Will deserves rest, Alana." Hannibal said, packing up Will's left overs for him. He was sure Will would appreciate the thought. "He's barely over his encephalitis and Jack is already calling for him back in the field. If this breaks him again Alana, I don't think any of us will be

able to put him back together." He used what she wanted to hear. She saw Will as a fragile thing and it was best it remained that way. "We'd best get going."

He looked to his phone and barely held back the smile that wanted to travel to his face.

Abigail Hobbs has decided to wake up.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Abigail awoke, she bit the nurse that was removing her breathing tube. It had been hard enough that the nurse needed over twenty stitches. Abigail wouldn't let go and some orderlies were needed to pry her away from the nurse. She was dragged kicking and screaming to the psych ward and after a full week of isolation, she finally calmed down enough to explain what happened. She explained that she didn't know where she was and that she thought she was still under attack from her father. Hannibal knew this was a lie of course, but why should he tell anyone when Abigail was so admirably manipulative. She was released from isolation and returned to her hospital room. Hannibal was the first to visit her after she bit the nurse and after she was let back into her old room at the pubic hospital, Will always hung back, not showing his face just yet. He was scared of what she might say to him. She was still under heavy observation but that wouldn't be a problem.

One late night, around 12 AM.

"Abigail." Hannibal greeted her and she sat up from her faux sleep. "I'm sorry to wake you."

"You know that I don't sleep anymore." Abigail replied.

"I do know. But it does bring some normalcy, does it not?"

"No... I don't feel like anything is normal anymore."

"I know."

"Then... what--what happened to me? I remember my dad and that man from the FBI and then... I bit that nurse." Abigail was quiet for a moment. "I bit that nurse because I felt like I needed to... I needed..."

"You needed to feed. You'd been under for quite some time, your body is wasting away."

"But they had a feeding tube down my throat, I don't know why I feel... so starving."

"Come with me, Abigail. I've brought clothes for you, get dressed. We're going out."

"Why?"

"So I can explain to you what you are becoming and how you can remedy the hunger."

Abigail did not argue after that. She simply dressed, pulling on a long sleeve shirt, jeans, simple shoes, a heavy jacket, a hat, and a heavy scarf. Though the extra layers weren't necessary, the chill didn't effect Abigail anymore, she knew this because she'd been brought out in the gardens in a heavy blanket and yet she felt like she didn't need it at all.

They left soon after Abigail finished dressing. They didn't go far as they were in an alley way only a few blocks away. They stopped before they entered the street. "You see that man across the street?" Hannibal asked. "Bring him here." Abigail moved to walk towards the man but was caught by her arm. "Not that way. Will him to come to you. Make eye contact and bring him here." Abigail looked at Hannibal strangely but did as she was asked. It was a long time before the man finally made eye contact, but when he had he moved towards them in short jerky movements, it earned some strange looks from passers by, but was brushed off as someone impaired.

He entered the alley way and Abigail looked frightened over what she had done, but interest won the battle. "Why did I... how did I do that?"

"You've gained telepathy, a way of controlling the mind." Hannibal replied then induced a fog over their victim's mind, keeping him pliant. "Now... do you know what to do now?"

Abigail shook her head quickly to which Hannibal raised a brow. "You're lying to me." He said and took a scalpel from his pocket, he barely nicked the man's throat before Abigail was on him, nearly tearing the man apart trying to get blood, she clawed and tore the nan open, scratching down to the bone of his ribcage. She pulled back, seemingly horrified with what she had done. Her face was wonderfully stained with red, matching her eyes quite well. She looked down at her hands, they too were covered in blood as well. She's torn this man apart. Hannibal helped her to her feet and hugged her tightly. "I'm proud if you, Abigail."

"What have I done?" She whimpered, to which Hannibal simply stroked her hair then lead her home. He'd return her in the morning, for now, Hannibal needed to watch her, make sure she told no one. But since she killed that man, it shouldn't be hard to convince her into secrecy.

Will woke early morning to a call from Jack. "There's been an attack. I think it's the ripper."

"I'll be there soon." Will replied, barely hiding the sleep in his voice. He got up, pissed, showered for an hour then dressed, wearing a scarf Hannibal had left him a week prior. Abigail had been awake for nearly two weeks and Will couldn't bring himself to see her. He was afraid of being accused and though Abigail would not be wrong to, it would hurt Will too much. He drove for an hour just to see an alley way and the picture of a man torn open, strung up with wings of glass behind him. A metamorphosis. Will had painted it before and that sick sense of pride settled in his stomach, he'd have to talk to Hannibal about it at some point... he had an appointment with the man today... he might as well get it out there. It's not like Will was doing this, he was just inspiring it.

"Someone came out of their shell." Will said, noting that the man's heart was outside his body and badly damaged. "I don't think the ripper did this... at least not the killing part."

"Are you saying that the ripper has a dog now?" Jack asked, looking at Will incredulously.

"Not a dog... a friend." Will replied. "A fledgling killer who didn't know what they were doing."

The skin on the man's neck was ripped away as if to hide some superficial injury, which Will was right about. The main artery had been slit open and the throat nearly torn out with such force it could only have been done by some kind of animal. This killer used their teeth and it disgusted Will to no end.

"This didn't start as art, this started as savagery." Will muttered, just out of earshot of Jack. The older man was currently arguing with Zeller weather or not the ripper ripped out this man's throat out or not. Jack took Will's word for it and argued for another killer.

"I'm just saying, the ripper got angry and literally ripped." Zeller argued.

"The ripper doesn't get angry." Will interjected. "He get's annoyed with these people, like one would with a bothersome pest."

"But he wouldn't take on someone so... inexperienced." Price said.

"He wouldn't unless this person was just like him. Unless this person was someone he could manipulate and mold into what he wanted." Will almost felt like he was talking about himself. the ripper was molding him, shaping him into something ugly and full of pride. Will would be a changed man after every ripper murder, the more art the killer recreated, the more sickening pride Will would feel.

They'd left after crime scene clean up arrived. Will hung around Baltimore for an hour until his appointment with Lecter. He waited in the designated waiting room only to find a woman he'd met walking out before his appointment. The girl he'd met at that first gallery... what was her name? Margret... Marley... Margo. Margo Verger, that disconcerting man's sister who Alana actually went on a date with. She simply nodded, acknowledging his existence before walking out. Hannibal waited at the door, watching Will in his mild daze as he watched Margot leave. The woman had that effect on people, drawing their minds to her but Margot knew better than draw Will's attention. He'd have to have a talk with her about boundaries and more specifically, what was Hannibal's and what was not.

"Will." Hannibal called the man's attention back to him, to which Will was even shocked that he'd been watching Margot so intently. "Come in, please."

"I'm sorry, my mind was... somewhere else." Will said and walked in past Hannibal. The man smelled like exhaustion and a hint of fever, he'd been working himself too hard these past few weeks, between forcing himself to create, galleries, and murder. But it only took eyes to see how tired Will really was.

"You seem tired today, are you well?" Hannibal asked.

"I haven't been sleeping. When I close my eyes I see the ripper, I see the man recreating my paintings."

"And that scares you?"

"No. That's the problem. I feel..." Will had to spit this out, other wise he felt it would eat him alive. "Pride."

"Pride in your work or his?"

"His. I feel pride that someone is seeing my work for what it is, not for what it could be or what they think it is. He sees me... it's only a matter of time before I see him."

"Pride isn't necessarily a bad feeling. Will, when was the last time you took time for yourself, minus hospital visits?" Hannibal asked.

"Never. This work is too important. I'm not worth time off."

"I believe you are. I have a question to ask you, and forgive me for being forward, but I'd like to give you a night off."

"A night off?" What did he mean by that? Why would he- Oh. *Oh.* "Dr. Lecter, are you asking me on a date?"

"Well, if you have to say it like that then I'm clearly not being forward enough. But yes."

A smile sneaked it's way onto Will's face. "I can't say I'm the best date, I've been told I get too consumed in where we are and not who I'm with."

"Then it'll be a night in."

"You've cooked for me so many times, Hannibal. You can't say you were wining and dining me then too." Will crossed his arms over his chest and lowered his head and with Hannibal's silence, a blush formed over his cheeks. Oh my god. He had been wining and dining Will since their first meeting and technically if this was going the way he thought this was going, this wouldn't be their first date. "You've been... trying to woo me the entire time." He said with a sudden realization.

"The key word, it would seem, would be trying." Hannibal lowered his head as well in faux embarrassment. In truth, Hannibal had no regret over anything he did, least of all when it came to Will.

"You..." Will started but couldn't seem to find the words. "I--why--" He had so many questions. Why him? Why now? Why, Why, Why? Will was a mess of a man and Hannibal was a perfectly stable put together man with more than enough charm to find someone better. Will knew this was coming now that he thought about it. The night they'd eaten together at Will's house, the night Hannibal slept of the sofa. Will can distinctly remember what Hannibal looked like, tired and peaceful on his couch.

"All I need is an answer, Will. I'll answer any questions you have, but I'd like to know." Hannibal's features were deceivingly soft and understanding. In all truth he was all too eager to persuade Will into saying yes, but in order for any of Hannibal's plan to work, this had to be Will's choice.

"Just... give me some time. I mean, yes, I'd like to. But I need some time." Will replied after a moment. "I'm just not myself today and this new ripper murder is... disconcerting."

"I understand." Hannibal replied and walked to Will until he was only about a foot away. He brushed the hair from Will's eyes, though it did not stay, it fell right back in place. Will hadn't flinched back from the touch but merely stayed still, closing his eyes for a moment. "You've all the time you need."

"Just give me a week so I'm not... this." Will smiled, not making eye contact with Hannibal but choosing to stare down at Hannibal's tie instead. It was a brilliant purple and red plaid that matched his suit very well.

"How does next Friday at 8 sound?" Hannibal asked.

"It sounds like a plan."

Friday night came all too soon. Will was still a mess from the week's work and he felt more unstable than ever. He'd had a bad week. First, the angel killer showed up on the map, killing criminals, then during a storm mid week a tree exploded from a lightening strike, effectively breaking several windows and injuring one dog. It had been hell cleaning up the glass and the evening chill now was able to creep in through the cracks in the boards Will had put up. The replacements would come next week, so he'd have to buy another space heater just for himself since he'd given them all to his dogs. He'd dressed as nicely as he could but he looked like a wet dog wrapped in cotton. His hair was a mess, the shirt was so wrinkled. He shouldn't go. This was a bad idea. Sure, Will knew he had a certain charm about him that people wanted. They wanted to take him from rags to riches but whenever they tried, Will didn't like it. He put the shirt back in his closet and sat down on the bed, shirtless and freezing. He held his head in his hands a gasped a few times, trying not to panic. It didn't help. He was panicking. Hannibal would see Will for the man he was and look down on him. Hannibal would know that Will was some sort of fraud posing as a famous artist. He didn't remember when he ended up on the floor, but he had. He still had a couple hours until he had to go to dinner, he picked up his phone, set an alarm and curled up in bed. In his haze of panic he's exhausted himself and when he closed his eyes, he felt comfort for the first time in a while now.

The being was back in his dreams. They hadn't been there for a while now, they hadn't been there to comfort him, to hold him the way they had. They wrapped their arms around him from the front this time, Will had his face in their chest. "Let go." They said. "Don't worry. I'm here."

"You... you weren't here." Will muttered and wrapped his arms around the being tightly. This is when he realized this being had no face and barely had a corporeal body. It was like they were made of ink floating in water. It should have disturbed Will... it should have.

"You didn't call to me. I'll always be here when you call." They spoke softly, pressing what felt like a kiss to the top of Will's head. "Always. Now let go."

"Let go of what?"

"Everything." Was the last thing it said before Will woke to his alarm. It was such a short dream, he wished he could have stayed longer. He wished he could bring this thing of his

dreams into reality, then he wouldn't be so scared and worried all the time.

Will got up, took a deep breath, and got to work making himself look presentable. He dug through his closet, finding an older lavender button up and a pair or dark dress pants. Then there was the matter of his hair. The messy mop that was his curls. He brushed it out and slicked it back as best he could, but one stubborn curl refused to stay. It was good enough. He looked good enough. He remembered when he'd gotten this lavender shirt... it was for a funeral. It made Will feel like laughing. A funeral shirt for a date night.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal: I'm gay 4 u
Will: I'm a human disaster.
Hannibal: Did you not just hear me?

Remember, Commenting makes me want to write more!

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Half date, half canon dialogue

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will arrives at Hannibal's door, well dressed and feeling nervous. He stood on the door step for a good while, his fingers going numb in the cold. It was 8:10 when he knocked on the door. Hannibal answered almost instantaneously.

"Will, please come in." He greeted. "You must be freezing."

"I've been warmer." Will replied with a small smile, Hannibal returned it.

When Will entered the house, heat enveloped him. It was just then that he realized how cold he really was.

"I've made a fire in the living room. Please, make yourself at home." Hannibal led him into said room. It was lavish, just as Will suspected. It was a nice shade of navy blue with dark leather couches and some expensive paintings adorning the walls. At least Will suspected that they were expensive. Why wouldn't they be? Will found himself desperate the get warm as Hannibal helped him remove his coat. He didn't realize his teeth were chattering until now and he of course moved to simply stand in front of the fire place, feeling the warmth. The heat hurt, but he ignored the pain as blood rushed back to his extremities. Hannibal could smell the chill on him, bitter and biting, clinging to Will so intently it would take a while for the warmth to set back in.

"Would you prefer to eat in front of the fire?" Hannibal asked, coming back after putting away Will's coat.

"I wouldn't ask that of you." Will replied.

"No need to ask." Hannibal smiled minutely. "I'm offering." He took Will's hand in his own, the chill not bothering him in the least. "Perhaps I shouldn't have taken your coat."

"Perhaps, Dr. Lecter, you should put one on. We're practically the same temperature." Will chuckled and shivered. He was sure he looked pitiful, but he found no pity in Hannibal's eyes. In truth, Hannibal was only slightly warmer than his cold fingers. He'd been expecting more heat from the man but perhaps he just ran cold while Will tended to run hot.

"We'll eat here. I don't want you to be uncomfortable."

Too late for that, thought Will. He'd never been comfortable on dates or anything that could be titled as a date. Hannibal left for the kitchen briefly before returning with steaming plates of stew, with large pieces of what Will guessed was beef or something like it. With his luck it was some Turkish buffalo that Hannibal had imported and he'd never know the difference.

"I'm sorry, I've brought you down to my level." Will said.

"I feel a sense of deja vu." Hannibal smiled, handing Will his bowl before sitting down on the expensive looking rug, Will followed. "I got here on my own. This is no fault of yours."

They ate in silence at first, Will felt uncomfortable in it with the clinking of spoons against glass bowls and the sounds of eating. He felt all to acutely aware of what was going on around him despite the fact that Hannibal had done this night in with Will's comfort in mind. Will felt guilty, guilty for making Hannibal sit with him like this. On the other hand, Hannibal had to qualms about sitting on the floor.

"At the risk of sounding cliche, how was your week?" Will asked.

"It was fine. A long one to be certain." Hannibal replied.

"Anything interesting?"

"Not that I could disclose anything, but I was invited to the opera this week."

"By a patient?"

"Indeed. He's... attached to me, to say the least."

"Oh... my."

"And yours?"

"Terrible... but I won't bring you down with the details." Will sighed into the spoon against his lips. "Just... a bad week."

"Alana told me something about a fire?"

"Yeah. Just a small one. Nothing I can't fix with a bit of dry wall and new insulation."

"I'm glad no one was injured." Hannibal hummed.

"Alana tells me you've been visiting Abigail. H-how is she?"

"She regained some normalcy through our visits. I've been taking her out into the gardens and spending time with her. Letting her talk and do what she likes. She'll be available for supervised release soon." Hannibal replied. "I'm thinking of bringing her on a trip into the city. You should come, she's yet to meet you."

"I doubt she'll want to meet me." Will paused and set down his bowl, looking down at his empty hands for a moment. The memory was so clear in his mind. "I... I murdered her

father."

"Now is to time to bring up painful memories." Said Hannibal. "I think this will be good for you both. One can lose perspective tucked away for weeks in an ivory tower."

"Are we still talking about Abigail?" Asked Will.

"We are. But also about you, Will." Hannibal let a minute expression of compassion cross his features.

"You want to bring me out of my 'tower'? Are you my knight in shining armor?"

"I'm you're anchor. Not a knight but something you can latch onto to keep upright." Hannibal replied. "I'd rather be your anchor than someone who will whisk you away from the world." Though the thought of hiding Will from the world and keeping him only for himself was appealing.

Will sighed again. "What kind of outing?"

"A simple shopping run. Abigail has few things that belong to her anymore and I need ingredients for the dinner I'll make for you."

"What if she doesn't like me?"

Hannibal moved closer to Will and put a hand on his shoulder. "I find it hard to believe anyone wouldn't enjoy your company."

"And yet there are so many."

"They are fools, the lot of them.

Will smiles sincerely for the first time in their visit. The knot in his stomach loosening, if only slightly.

Abigail could smell her before she entered the room. She smelled like the color red and not at all surprisingly, she was a red head. Abigail busied herself to pretend she hadn't know anyone was coming. The woman entered.

"You're not a doctor or a nurse or a psychiatrist." She didn't know what this woman was but she did know that she spelled danger for Abigail. "Who are you?" She asked.

"I’m a journalist. I want to tell the truth. Your truth. Sometimes that involves some deception. But know this, I will never lie to you." Said the woman.

"Sounds like something a liar would say." Abigail retorted.

"You have every right not to trust me, but in time, Abigail, I hope you let me prove that you can. If you tell me what you know, I can help you fill in the blanks"

"Why not tell me what you know."

"Your dad was the Minnesota Shrike. Your mother wasn't the first person your father killed. He killed 8 girls. 8 girls that look --"

"Just like me."

"Yes."

"He ate them, Abigail. He was sick."

"Does that mean I'm sick too." *Yes,* thought Abigail, *I'm sick just like Hannibal is sick.*

"You'll be fighting that perception. Perception is the most important thing in your life right now."

"I don't care what anyone thinks." Abigail hissed.

"You better start caring, Abigail. What you remember, what you tell everyone, is going to define the rest of your life. Let me help you."

"Help me what?"

"Carve a path in this world so you can survive what your father did. And not be held accountable."

Abigail realizes the truth in that statement. She looks down to the ground for a moment before looking back up to Freddie.

"How did they catch him?" She asked.

"A man named Will Graham. Works for the FBI but isn't FBI, if fact he's a painter and what he paints... well, let's just leave it at he's a painter. He catches insane men because he can think like them. Because he is insane."

Will, followed by Hannibal, followed by two orderlies enter the room just as Freddie finished.

"Speak of the devil." Said the red head.

"Would you excuse use please?" Will asked, his voice wavering between polite and angry. He wouldn't feed her anything that she could use, not this time.

"I'm not leaving you alone with her."'

The orderlies flank Freddie and start steering her out of the room. She pushes through them. "If you want to talk--"

Will snatches the card from her without another word. She is escorted out with little trouble.

"Doctor Lecter." Abigail said, some relief coloring her voice.

"How are you, Abigail?" Hannibal smiled minutely.

"Bored out of my mind here. You've come to take me out, right? You said you would once I--" She stopped. *Once I could control myself. See, I'm controlling myself now. Will isn't in any danger.* "Once I'd be allowed to leave."

"We are taking you out. This is Will Graham, do you remember him?"

She nodded. "You killed my dad."

That sends a knife through Will's already tied up gut. The pain in almost unbearable, the regret, the guilt. His eyes flick down to the floor. Hannibal looked between the two of them and sighed through his nose. How blunt of her. She and Will were just alike in that sense.

"Come, Abigail. We have much to do and little time to do it in." Hannibal said and moved to place a leading hand on Abigail's shoulder, squeezing ever so slightly to let he know she needed to be kinder to Will.

They drove in silence.

Chapter End Notes

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